

# **GUIDANCE ON:** **INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REFERRAL NETWORKS**



# WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT YOU?

The question you should ask yourself before considering setting up your external referral network, what is it about your practice and what you can offer that is going to make other clinicians refer to you above all others!

Take time to think about this very carefully, and consider the local area too - do your research (and by this I mean - deep research!) check through websites, whatclinic, speak with the dental community, check Instagram and facebook, look through their reviews... is anyone else offering what you can offer? And is what they have to offer better than what you have to offer?

This is a time to be really hard on yourself, and be prepared to make changes if necessary- especially if you want to be the “go to” referral practice in your area.

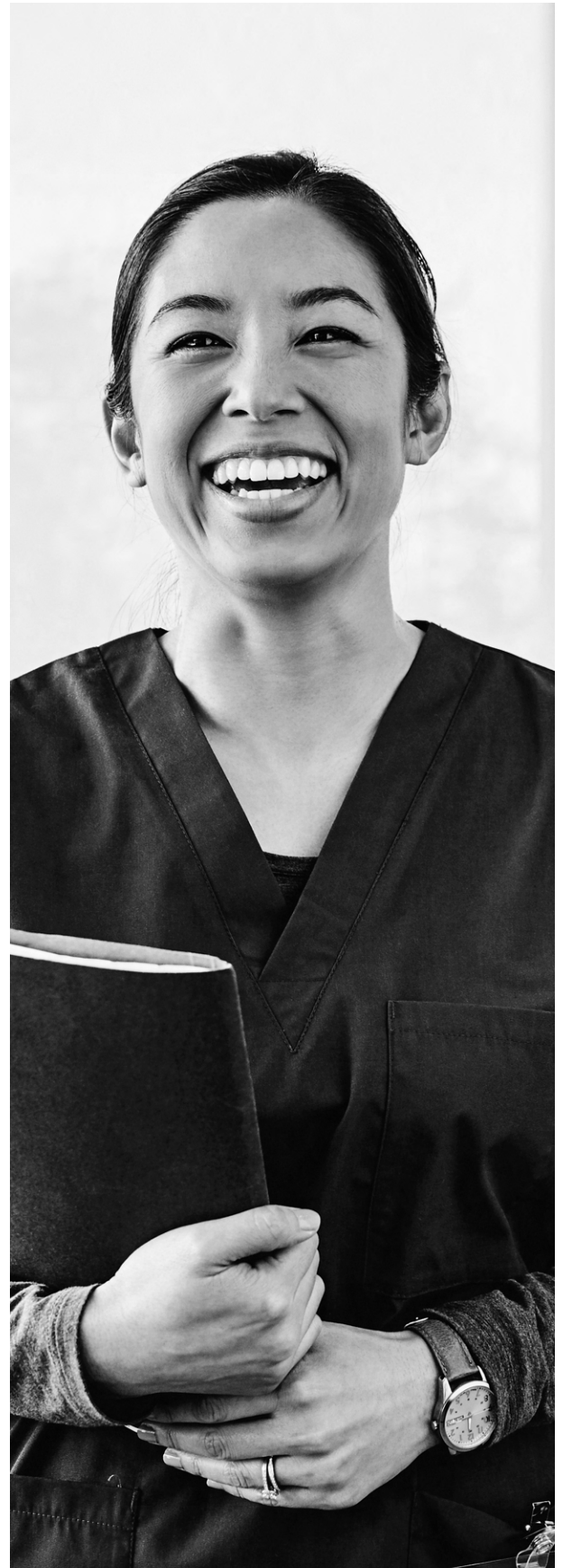
## Task Number 1

What is it that you can offer to external practices? Make an exhaustive list! Whether this is high quality composite restorations, implants, orthodontics, surgical extractions, OPG or CT, sedation, specialist perio or endo, advanced bone grafting, guided implant placement or even facial aesthetics.

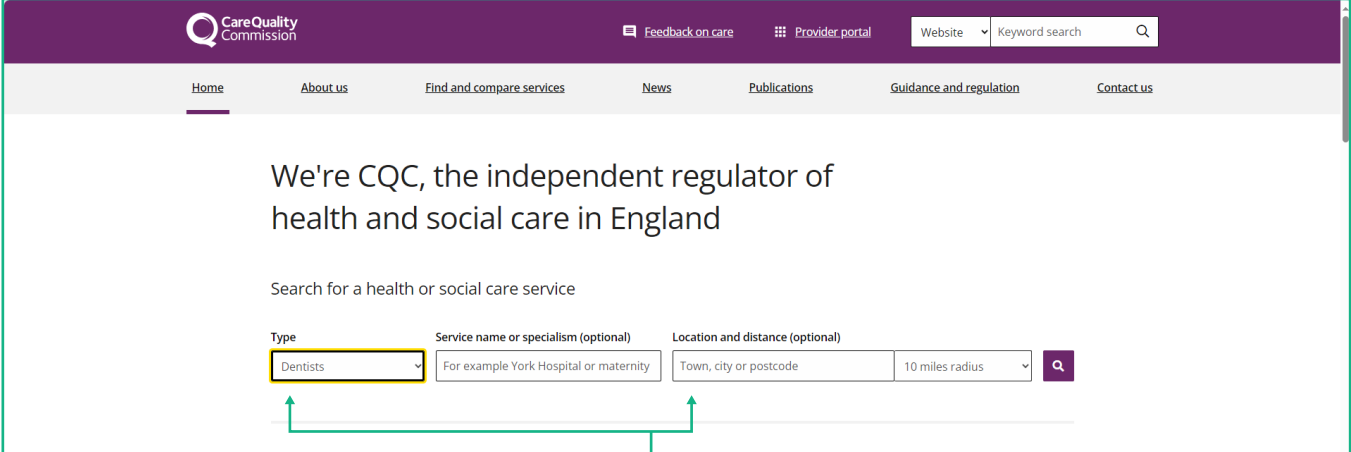
## Task Number 2

What is it about these things that you offer, that are superior to others? Is it your training and expertise? Do you have enough case studies to back up the quality of your work, along with great patient reviews? Is it your location and ease of access to these facilities and appointment times to the patients? (because, don't forget- if a patient is only going to end up on a long waiting list then they may end up going elsewhere or not using you again in the future)

**Once you know what it is you want to offer, and the key points that differentiate you from the competition- you can then start planning on who it is you want to approach.**



# FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHO CAN WE TARGET?



If you're trying to build up your referral base, and looking for other dentists to contact, CQC is the first port of call.

Go onto the CQC website, change the search criteria to "Dentists", enter the town or postcode local to you and then search. You can set your distance and even view the places on the "map view".

Also something to consider would be radius of where you want to target - and how many practices are in this area. Are you in a particularly rural area with not many practices? You may need to set your sights further afield.

You also don't want to risk approaching too many practices at once - if the best case scenario comes along and all of these start sending to you, make sure you have the time and resources to see and treat these patients.

Compile your list of practices you'd like to approach, and again - conduct your research. Take your time to look through their websites and make a note of the owners and associates names, as well as any mentioned staff members.

Relationship building with the practice is imperative for long term referrer loyalty, better quality referrals and helps to build a community if later down the line you decide to offer something more than referral taking – such as CPD and study clubs (which we will cover later).

It's not enough to send out a blanket email, or non-personalised letter with a bunch of referral sheets - for best long term success, take your time with this process.

## Task Number 3

Do you plan on offering any added extras? Such as mentorship, offering the referrers to come and watch or assist with treatment that they refer patients for, a contractual agreement to not poach any patients that they refer to you?

Have a think of the added value benefits that would come with referring to you.

# MAKING FIRST CONTACT

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Once you have defined your offering, what sets you apart, and your contact list (including specific names) you can start planning on how to make the best first impression.

How do you plan on reaching out to these practices? You have a couple of options.

**You could send them a hamper:** this is really going the extra mile, and definitely shows them that you want their business. However depending on how many people you plan on sending to, it could end up being pretty costly.

**You could visit them in person:** I would recommend this with whatever you plan on giving them, an in-person visit shows them you value making a real connection with them and their practice.

**You could invite them along to a referrer networking meet and greet:** This is a nice way of building your referral community, and you also have the option to give a talk about a topic that could interest them in order to showcase the reasons why they should refer to you - maybe throw in some free CPD to sweeten the deal.

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## Referral packs, what should you include?

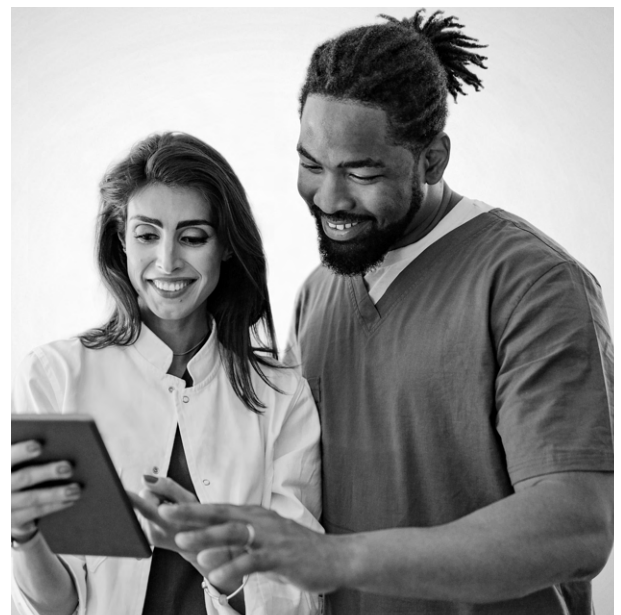
- Price list
- Map and details of parking/ local transport
- Referral process
- Photos of your practice, team, details of expertise
- Referral forms/ QR code cards that can be scanned to bring up a digital Referral form
- Links to social media sites and website
- Your promises to the referrer and added extras
- Specific referral criteria for each offering
- Leaflets that can be handed out to referred patients (these must also contain your location, details of your services, price list)

## Task Number 4

Take a moment to think about the perfect referral pack, what would yours include?

Think outside the box. Consider every hamper or referral pack you've received in the past.

What did you like? What didn't you like?





## TRAINING SESSIONS FOR REFERRAL PRACTICES

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An added extra that you can offer to your referrers is in house training, or the possibility of shadowing you in your own practice.

Knowledge and best practice sharing helps to strengthen these relationships, and makes for better quality referrals.

If your referrer knows your process and the your criteria first hand, they can give you more detailed information when referring - but also

by being involved in the process themselves it will give them more confidence to speak to you about upcoming cases, get your opinion and be able to follow up on treatment afterwards.

Because at the end of the day - really this is all about giving the best experience, treatment and follow up for the patient.

## INVOLVE THE WHOLE PRACTICE

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Knowledge and best practice sharing doesn't only have to be for clinicians - you can also offer this for implant and orthodontic nurses, receptionists and treatment coordinators who are keen to see how your practice operates.

This act of involving the support staff in the referral process will help the promotion of the treatments you offer in the practice.

The referring practice staff should have a firm appreciation of your offering, and why they should promote it as an arm to the services that they offer.

In many practices, the main reason for the lack of involvement of the support staff is mostly due to the fact that because their practice doesn't offer the treatment in house they feel it is not important to know about it or how to explain the benefits to patients.

Your practice and the treatments that you offer need to be seen as an extension of their own practice - so getting the buy in from everyone in the practice is key to achieving this.



## **FOLLOW UP AND COMMUNICATION**

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Just as important as first impressions- following up with the practice and keeping regular contact throughout the various steps in the patient journey is imperative.

This is the cause of breakdown of many referrer relationships, when clear communication channels are not established. This can often happen when there is no one person responsible for following through with this and sending out the appropriate information.

There are a number of ways that you can follow up with your referrers, some great examples include:

- Sending a branded USB with details of the treatment and any before/after photos
- Sending a customised video message at each stage of the journey, using a platform such as Loom with screen recording capabilities
- Or even just following up an email with a quick phonecall

### **Added extra: the dental influencer**

In this day and age, many clinicians are taking to Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn to showcase their skills and case studies- which is a fantastic way to open up conversations with other clinicians and make yourself known in the community to would-be referrers.

Now, this is not the easiest method of attracting new referring clinicians, it requires a certain level of work to show your best side.

You need to be regular with your posting and follow up, you need to have a good level of case recording and photography and you need to be clear on the big picture.

Being a dental influencer, you become public in the dental community - meaning that whatever you put out there needs to be on point.

If you aren't particularly happy sharing your knowledge and expertise for free - this may not be the option for you, as I can promise you that people will approach you for advice and your opinion if they consider what you are doing to be brilliant. However if you do run a course, study club or webinar/podcast series then this is a fantastic way of promoting this to other clinicians. You can reveal a small amount of information on your page for free, in order to drive traffic towards your webpage or course registration.

# LET'S TALK

## YOUR INTERNAL REFERRAL NETWORK

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Your internal network is just as important as your external network. Your associates and hygienists need to be followed up with and communicated with just as well as those in your external network.

Not only this, but you need to monitor your internal referrals closely.

### Question:

Are you currently monitoring your internal referrals? Do you know how the conversations they have with patients are going? Do you ever monitor the conversion rate of the conversations they are having?

If not, why not?

Logging your internal referrals helps you address your associates or colleagues, and identify any areas of concern or (at the very least) highlight maybe *why* they don't want to refer internally to you.

Alternatively, if the internal referrals are great- you can make a note of this and reward your colleagues for helping you out.

As an example, if you have an associate or colleague that works 4/5 days a week, has at least 1000 active patients, performs about 20-30 extractions a month and has *never* sent a patient across to you for an implant, you need to be asking yourself why:

- Is it that they don't talk about implants as an option?
- Is the way that they are talking about them off putting for patients?
- Are they wondering "whats really in it for me?" by sending you a patient?
- Or do they refer to someone outside of the practice which you don't know about?

Whatever the reason - you need to address it. You may not be able to solve it, but it may change the way that you advertise to patients.

An internal referral network is something that many take for granted, as you assume that naturally everyone who works in the practice will be referring treatment internally. Sadly, this is not always the case.

You need to maintain relationships with your internal referrers just as much as external. They too need to be sure that you aren't going to pass judgement on their work, or steal their patient. What you are offering isn't always in the forefront of their mind, so it often is forgotten or not expressed to patients in quite the same way you would speak to a patient about that option.

You may want to consider conducting in-house training with your colleagues, helping them to feel more confident discussing various treatments, or asking them to fill out an anonymous questionnaire if you feel that the problems may be deeper than purely confidence levels.

### Question:

Do you invite your colleagues along to the patient consultation so they can be a part of it?

Do you hold regular catch up sessions to give them details of what's going on with the patients that they do refer?

Do you discuss the quality of the referrals you receive?

**Tip:** If you know that your associates/colleagues aren't talking about treatments that you offer to their patients, make sure that you have plenty of marketing around the practice and easy access to consultations with either yourself or a TCO.

# HOW TO WIN OVER YOUR INTERNAL REFERRERS

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Learn your colleagues professional *love language*: what can you do which will incentivise them?

Because everyone's idea of an incentive is different:

- Some people like to be financially compensated, which could imply that they wish to undertake the restoration of an implant themselves in order to share the financial benefit of the patient's treatment. For these individuals seeking out appropriate restorative educational courses may be the best solution, or even referring patients across to them for something they do particularly well.
- Some like words of affirmation, to be noticed and appreciated for what they are doing for you. A 'thank you' goes a long way.
- Some appreciate your quality time:
  - Are you spending time working through the case with them?
  - Getting their advice and opinions?
  - Asking them to join you for the surgery?
- And some like acts of service:
  - Are you aware of the goals that they have for themselves?
  - Are you helping them achieve those goals?

**Learn what makes them tick, appeal to it, and they will be far more likely to help you work towards your goal.**

