

KEEPING IT CONFIDENTIAL

PATRICIA MUNRO DESCRIBES WHAT SHE DOES AS “ALMOST LIKE DATING FOR DENTAL PRACTICES, IT IS ABOUT MATCHING PEOPLE UP”

She doesn't just help people buy and sell practices, she makes sure that the buyer and purchaser are suited and that the practice's existing staff and patients won't be too adversely affected by any change in ownership.

She said: “Patient and staff care has to be central to any practice sale because most dentists want to make sure their staff and patients are well looked after. I always advise a dentist who is buying an existing practice not to make drastic changes early on. They have bought the practice because they liked all the elements about the business – the recipe if you will. You don't just change that recipe if it is working. You will want to make changes and put your stamp on your acquisition, but, you do it gradually and that way patients and staff won't vote with their feet.”

Patricia has been in dentistry her whole working life, first as a dental nurse before moving to Canada to train as a preventive therapist. She returned to the UK and took a position as a practice manager before joining Healthco UK, and then Claudius Ash as a sales representative covering the west coast. She then joined Kerr UK in the early 1990s and spent “22 glorious years” at the company, in her role as Scottish manager.

Around 16 years ago, she started working with Ron Currie, a fellow sales rep with Henry Schein, who had previously worked at Cottrell. She said: “Ron and I started doing practice valuations as well as our day jobs and we got gradually busier over time. It got to the point where we were getting requests from lawyers, accountants and other associated companies to do valuations and also get involved with other aspects of practice sales, practice acquisitions and recruitment.

“About 10 years ago, I said to Ron that



we really should start a company to do this full-time, but he had an exit strategy for his retirement at this point and he encouraged me to set up myself.”

With their myriad contacts and knowledge of the dental community in Scotland, Patricia and Ron had built an enviable reputation, not just for their knowledge and expertise, but also for their confidentiality. Therefore, when it came to naming their business, Confi-Dental immediately sprang to mind. The name has since changed to Strictly ConfiDental, but the ethos behind it is still the same. Patricia explained: “You won't find the details of any of the sales out there online, they won't be on the website or anywhere else. Ron and I always felt that the less is known about a sale or a purchase the better as it allows us to personally match up the right people to the right practice.

“If a sale becomes public knowledge then staff might find out and patients might find out, causing unnecessary uncertainty and upheaval. It's not about

keeping staff and patients in the dark, it is about making sure the deal has the best chance of succeeding.”

Patricia personally interviews each and every client, making sure that they are able to work together and to find out what they are looking for in a practice, to get a feel for their ambitions and to get an idea of how far they are willing to travel to get the perfect practice. She said: “I always say to my clients, ‘I will always phone you up when something comes up’ – it might not be on their wishlist in terms of location etc, but I encourage them to take a look if I think it has potential.

“I think it is important to build up a relationship with a dentist – the more practices we see together, the better idea I have of what they really want.”

With her contacts and knowledge of the industry, she also offers a recruitment service for associates and locums all over the country and is a founder member of Association of Scottish Dental Professionals (ASDP), which provides “a great transfer of information” and provides a wealth of knowledge and expertise from lawyers and accountants, to practice management software specialists.

When asked if she should have set up in business earlier in her career, she is typically forthright: “To be honest I don't think I would have been ready if I'd done this earlier. I have the experience and the relationships built up over the last 20 to 30 years and that is vital in what I do. It is all about who you know after all.

“The most important thing for me when I walk away from a sale is that I am sure it is a good fit. Some of these dentists have been in the same practice for 20 or 30 years so it is important to them that we get it right.”