Preparing for the worst

By Fiona Stuart-Wilson

Each year some practice-  

eres have to deal with an  

ergency – not a medi-  
cal emergency but a business  

ersity. Although most of  

us have insurance, we do so on the  

basis that we hope that the risks  

we are insuring practices against will never actually happen. Of course the likelihood of the sort of risk occurring which would affect our ability to operate as a dental practice is low but there is no getting away from the fact that the unexpected does happen, and insurance is really there to provide you with cover should the unexpected occur.

Disasters by their very nature are usually unexpected but that does not mean we should not try to forecast some of the greater risks that we face.

Think through some of the risks to your practice and what these might mean for the practice. This could include accidents such as fire, natural disaster, loss of key members of staff or crime.

1. What could go wrong?

Disasters by their very nature are usually unexpected but that does not mean we should not try to forecast some of the greater risks that we face.

2. How safe is practice property?

Make sure your practice is as prepared as it can be to survive a disaster. Carry out a regular check on how secure your building, equipment, computer systems, records and website are.

For instance how many people have access to the burglar alarm code or keys? How often is the code changed? Are valuable documents and equipment kept in a safe or left in a desk drawer?

If you haven’t already, consider photographing all of your valuables and equipment for insurance purposes and keep copies of key documents such as insurance policies. Make sure these are in a safe place that more than one trusted person knows about.

3. Where else could we work from?

If disaster strikes your patients will require urgent care and you still need to run your dental business. You should have arrangements in place now for an alternative location to treat patients or at least send them to the event in the that you cannot see them in your practice.

4. Do our staff know what to do?

Make sure that your team knows what your disaster plan is and when and where they should relocate to work in the event of an emergency.

5. How will we pay the bills and keep going?

If you have to leave your practice premises you won’t know how long it will be before you can return. If you have to leave them in a hurry, take the practice cheque book, some important cards and keep enough cash on hand to meet emergency cash flow needs.

6. How will we tell the patients?

You will need to let patients know quickly in the event of an emergency or disaster, as they need to be reassured, told what to do and where to go. Make sure for example you have an arrangement in place with your website provider so that they can put this information on the home page of the website as quickly as possible. Save time later by writing that information copy now! It should include your emergency contact information, details of your backup surgery premises, and what to do about appointments. You can also use social media to get the word out about your emergency arrangements.

Just as we buy insurance hoping we will never need a claim, so we should be reassured, tell the patient as soon as possible that they will be able to keep going.

About the Author

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