

The journal for

Private Dentistry

Essential reading for private practice development

April 2014 vol 19 no 4

Watertight

How Dental Works overcame disaster and stayed afloat



How I did it

When a water pipe flooded the practice last year, **Shahzad Naseem** took the opportunity to update and expand Dental Works by Shaz & Associates. Here, he shares his story

I opened Dental Works by Shaz & Associates in May 2005, in Milton Keynes, and with the help of my wife Ruby and excellent team, it had been running smoothly and successfully.

When the practice first opened, it consisted of four surgeries; by the end of 2012 we had expanded it to six surgeries, running busy NHS and private clinics, hygienist sessions and oral health education for children. Then disaster struck!

On Friday 20 December 2013, the practice closed at 3pm. In the Christmas spirit, everyone left excited about doing their last minute shopping and spending the following week with family and friends.

Ruby and myself were especially looking forward to a family birthday the next day, and breakfast with friends, but it was not to be.

Disaster strikes

At 7am on Saturday 21 December, I received a voicemail message saying that there was water going into the basement that was coming out of our unit. Initially I thought it might be a leak in one of the toilets, but when I arrived at the practice I was greeted by water flowing out of the front door. I went from room to room to find the leak and as I got closer to the plant room I heard it! It was the mains water pipe in the plant room that had split at the connection.

There were three security and maintenance people from the building with me. We agreed that they would bring a water vacuum to start getting the water out while I called for help. I called my wife and son Shahyan, who were at the practice within 15 minutes, followed by some staff members, Joan, Jenny, Ann and Kemi.

By this time, we all realised that it wasn't a job for a small water vacuum and some more equipment and manpower was needed to



tackle the amount of water covering the 3,000 square feet of the practice. We got some industrial size vacuums from HSS and called in more family members. Shahyan took on the job of the big vac, and everyone else started moving anything that could be saved to a dry place, which was a room on the second floor of the building arranged by Station House management. Our hygienist Sara and her husband also came to help along.

Reassurance insurance

It was a long, hard day, but by the end of it we thought we'd done well and had actually managed to dry out the place enough to open on Monday morning. Throughout the day, we had been calling the insurance company, but were unable to get through: there was no emergency number and no answer phone.

We returned home at 7pm and sent the insurance company an enquiry through its website. We received a response an hour later, which acknowledged our reporting of the incident and an apology about its phones, which had been down due to a power cut. At 11pm, after many phone calls and emails with the insurance company, we arranged an urgent call out with Chemdry to assess the damage for 8am the next morning.

We had also called EBS-IT earlier in the day, as we needed our computers to be assessed for water damage. Unfortunately, it wasn't good news: some of them had been destroyed by the amount of water in them.

As the day drew to a close, we realised that the practice was not safe to open on Monday and the extent of the damage was went far beyond what we had anticipated. We knew we were in for some long, tiring and stressful days ahead.



The practice

Dental Works by Shaz & Associates
Unit 1, Station House, 500 Elder
Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BB

T: 01908 696131

E: info@dental-works.co.uk

W: www.dental-works.co.uk

The team

Shahzad Naseem (dentist)

Nadeem Rathore (dentist)

David Gonzalez (dentist)

Nancy Turki (dentist)

Sabrina Parmar (dentist)

Ejike Oynelobi (dentist)

Aneel Jaisinghani
(orthodontist)

Sara Andrews (hygienist)

Ann Grant
(practice coordinator)

Jenny (dental nurse)

Joan (dental nurse)

Laura (dental nurse)

Jade (dental nurse)

Steph (dental nurse)

Elena (dental nurse)

Sheila (receptionist)

Chantel (receptionist)

Lauren (receptionist)

Ruby Naseem
(practice manager)

The background

This is the second time *Private Dentistry* has seen this practice in its How I Did It section, with the first article being published back in March 2006. The practice was runner-up in the Best New Practice category at the Private Dentistry Awards 2006. Eight years on, and one burst water pipe later, Shaz and his team had to start again, giving them the chance to expand and improve their Milton Keynes practice.

You're never fully dressed
without a
Smile

The vision

Established in May 2005, and revamped in 2013, the practice offers its patients the latest dental and cosmetic treatments in comfortable, modern surroundings. In addition, nervous patients are encouraged to attend so they can overcome their fears and feel at ease.

The look

Disaster struck when the water pipe in the plant room split at the connection, flooding the practice. Shaz and his team decided to make the most of the situation, and refurbish the practice. In addition to updating the colour scheme, furnishings and practice literature, Shaz has added another surgery to make a total of seven.

60
SECOND
TOUR

Saving the day

We started at 8am the next day with Chemdry and electrical testing. The floors were once again soaking and the dental chairs, which all had water in the base, were not safe to use. Despite it being the Christmas holidays, Jacqui Tibbetts from Promec kindly agreed to come and see what could be saved on Monday 23 December.

We were advised that we needed a specialist loss adjuster on the scene as soon as possible, so we called the insurance company to arrange this. We were thankful that Chris Harris from Crawford GTS, who dealt with the business interruption side of the claim, came on the same day. He talked us through the insurance process, and reassured us that he would be back the next day with Nigel Forrest to assess the material damage at the practice.

Being a mixed private and NHS practice, we were quite concerned how this would affect our contract with the health authority. Not knowing how long the practice would be closed for or the effect of the closure on delivering the contract was an extremely worrying time.

Love thy neighbour

Arrangements were made at a neighbouring dental practice for our team to use their premises to see dental emergencies and some routine patients. We are highly appreciative of Dr Deepak Songra and Dr Tony Pelusso for their help and support throughout this difficult time.

A temporary reception was set up with remote access by EBS-IT, so that we could answer phone calls and access patient records while the practice was closed. We called patients that had appointments booked within the next six weeks to offer alternatives. This situation carried on until the end of January: there was no clear timescale at this time and we just had to do what we could on a daily basis.

We had to inform the landlords and confirm the responsibility of the main water pipe, which came under our lease, so had to go through our insurance. There wasn't much happening at this stage, it being Christmas Eve, but we were still hoping to get acceptance from UK General. We received a call that afternoon from the insurance company saying that it wouldn't be able to make a decision on liability until after Christmas. We had no choice but to wait.

In the meantime, we were speaking to Promec regarding its availability to do the job, what could and could not be saved, whether or not the insurance would pay for it, and so on.



On 27 December, we anxiously waited for a call from the insurers as well as arranging removal and storage of all the items that were saved, to be ready for the job to start as soon as we got the go-ahead.

Then, on 30 December, we got a call from the loss adjuster to say that the insurers had appointed an independent company – Davis, French & Associates Limited – to come out and assess the damage before any decisions could be made on the claim. We were also told that, due to the size of the claim, QBE Insurance Group wanted to deal with it directly, meaning that UK General would no longer be part of it. UK General agreed to keep us updated with any information it got.

The loss adjuster's report was submitted to QBE on the morning of 31 December. Their office was due to close for New Year's Eve at noon. As the insurer decided what it was going to do, we were putting our computers, records, instruments, stock and furniture in storage. The damage report suggested that most, if not all, of the equipment could be dried and reconditioned but that nobody would be willing to give any guarantees for it. Other dental equipment engineers said the same: they could repair the equipment but would not guarantee it.

We had to tell our loss adjuster that this was unacceptable – the equipment had to be signed off as being safe and reliable.

We got confirmation from QBE of liability acceptance before it closed for the new year, which was such a relief after 10 stressful days.

A big ask

Out of the few companies that we contacted for quotes and possible dates, Promec was the only one that was really prompt with replies and willing to commit to such a large project in the timescales that we were suggesting – a three month job in three weeks.

Nigel Forrest had a conference call with QBE and Chris Harris on Friday 3 January to decide whether the contract could be awarded to Promec without any other quotes to avoid further delay. We got a call with the verdict later that morning: QBE had agreed a full strip-out and for work to start as soon as possible.

Armed with the news that the contract could go to Promec without the need of further quotes, we arranged an urgent meeting to finalise equipment to be ordered the same day.

The next day was extremely emotional. We had now started to look forward to the new practice but we were also very sad to let go of what we had had for the last eight years.

We were aiming for the practice to reopen on 3 February 2014, which seemed an impossible task. But Promec reassured us that it could be achieved, so we remained optimistic.

On 4 and 5 January, everything was stripped out and Promec's designer came to do the drawings for the layout. Large heaters and



dryers also appeared and were left in the practice for three days. Some stud walls had to be cut back to dry the unit out, as the insulation was completely soaked. Alongside this, we were compiling lists of other material damage apart from dental equipment, and contacting the loss adjusters many times a day.

Promec has a great team of workers and took away a lot of pressure by arranging everything in-house. What's more, everything was done with a smile: nothing was too much of an issue, which helped keep our spirits up.

High and dry

On 10 January, once everything was dry, we started work to rebuild Dental Works by Shaz & Associates.

I was visiting the practice every day to get everything set up ready for the opening, and, reassured by Promec's confidence that it would be done in time, we started booking patients in.

We spent the first weekend of February restocking and setting up surgeries, offices and reception, while Promec finished off its work. The whole team came in to participate, which again was an enormous support, and gave me a lot of confidence to start afresh and make the new practice just as big a success as before.

When we opened the practice in 2005, there was a wow factor to it that was appreciated by everyone who walked in. We wanted to not only recreate that look, but also make some improvements.

With all of our branded stationery being destroyed with everything else by the water damage, we decided that this was the ideal time to make changes, so took the opportunity of giving the practice a completely new look. We changed the colour scheme from bold red/black/grey to teal/brown/cream tones. We kept the logo and main theme of the stationery the same but just changed that to teal as well.

Super seven

All of the surgeries are large and due to a slight change of design, there was one room that actually had space for two, so we divided it and now have a total of seven surgeries.

Each surgery has a colour theme as before, the only difference being that the cabinetry and flooring are the same in all the rooms, with a brightly-coloured dental chair and feature wall.

We also took this opportunity to update our existing decontamination room to current standards. Due to the changes in this room, we arranged for the team to be trained by a specialist before reopening so that everyone was aware of the new procedures.

As predicted, the practice was all finished and ready (apart from a few minor issues and teething problems) to welcome patients on the morning of 3 February. Since opening, we have had a fantastic response from patients to the changes that we've made and I'm really proud of what's been achieved in such a short time.



Learning lessons

I have learnt some valuable lessons during this time and hope to make a difference to someone else by sharing my story. We generally think that these things happen to others but, as I have learnt, no one is immune.

The most important lesson is to stay calm, focused, positive and lead by example. As a team leader, if you panic then that trickles down and even the simplest things become monstrous. Have sufficient and appropriate insurance cover, speak to your insurers or read your existing insurance policy and make sure you are covered adequately. You don't need to be overly insured, but keep in mind inflation – and definitely don't be under-insured. If you do get flooded, take photos of all the damaged areas, equipment etc. Also, I cannot stress enough the importance of off-site back up. It doesn't cost much but you realise the true value if you ever lose your server. EBS-IT has done a fantastic job of reinstating our computer hardware and software.

It is paramount to have a strong bond with your team, rewarding staff routinely, and keeping them updated with any changes or unusual circumstances. This ensures a pleasant working environment and it is invaluable in challenging times. I had regular meetings with all of my staff during the whole process of rebuilding and kept them updated.

It is also essential to keep in mind that after all your efforts there will be always be one or two team members who will let you down. They panic and assume that, as you're going through a hardship, that's how it's going to stay in future – and they will look for opportunities elsewhere. My view is to get rid of them, if possible, as they have a negative effect on an otherwise positive team.

A disaster like this is an opportunity for rebranding and restructuring the practice, like major businesses do from time to time. Always look for the silver linings to the clouds.

Moving on

The practice was formally inaugurated by Mark Lancaster MP, Milton Keynes. Now that we are up and running, and back to normal, with a renewed zeal, we feel the sleepless nights, stress, numerous emails/phone calls/meetings/discussions have not been in vain – we can all see the amazing results and the fantastic feedback we're getting from the patients. We now move forward with all the lessons learnt during this time to make Dental Works an even more comfortable and better place for people to work and come to for their dental health and wellbeing.

There are some people I would like to thank. Without their support this achievement would not have been possible: my three children Fatima, Shahyan, Faizan, Aidan (my son in law), my dental team, Dr Deepak Songra (Abacus Dental Practice), Dr Tony Pelusso, (Stratford House Dental Practice) and last but not least my wife, Ruby who worked relentlessly and hardly got any sleep during these six weeks. 

COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

Crawford GTS (loss adjusters)
T: 01295 738602
W: www.crawfordgts.com

EBS-IT (computers, hardware and IT support)
T: 01327 810062
W: www.ebs-it.co.uk

Promec (dental design and build)
T: 01746 765700
W: www.promecdental.com



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