

Theft in Dental Practice

While most transactions in a dental practice are of a credit card and cheque nature, instances of theft occur, sometimes substantial. There are usually a couple of elements involved:

1. A long-term trusted employee abuses their position; and
2. There's a weakness in the system of control.

Over the past ten years or so we have come across regular instances of theft. These days it's less likely to involve money coming into the practice, but rather it's likely to be a case of a busy boss signing cheques brought to him by a trusted long-term employee in a moment between surgeries. The cheques are purportedly for the purpose of paying for dental supplies and services, but almost certainly there's a cheque with the payee identification incomplete. The cheque will probably be for a credible amount to a regular supplier. Clearly there's a bit of sleight of hand involved, and the cheque is subsequently paid into a private account. In instances that have been detected, the catalyst to detection was a practice valuation or benchmarking of a practice which identified an unusually high expense pattern within a practice. When queried as to the reason, the practice owner has then begun to check payments for purchases. It's less prevalent in dental practice than in veterinary practices where there are more counter sales, and there is greater ability to fiddle the till.

The underlying motivation may be greed or jealousy, or the funding of a gambling or substance abuse habit. In some instances the theft was discovered after an individual had left a practice and cash flow had been relieved.

Invariably the practice owner(s) involved have been shocked to realise that their trust had been abused.