

What more do we have to do?

Dave Martin describes how he and BADT President Debbie McGovern went to Westminster to make the case for dental therapists.

Following a news piece on national media about patients struggling to access an NHS dentist, my ears pricked up. The solution, if only we could get someone to listen, is for patients to have direct access to dental therapists.

I promptly emailed the ex Liberal Democrat



Dave Martin, Tim Farron MP and Debbie

Leader and MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale, Tim Farron, who was highlighting the issue, explaining how dental therapists and other dental care professionals could alleviate access to dental care, explaining we were severely restricted due to the terms of the current contract. I also contacted Debbie McGovern, President of BADT. This was an opportunity not to be missed and Debbie gladly took the reins and an open dialogue was instigated.

Debbie forged links with Tim's office and brilliantly used her skills to secure a meeting in Westminster with the right honourable gentleman. Brexit or no Brexit, Debbie was undeterred, dental health care issues still need

to be addressed! I was invited to attend the meeting with Debbie and Tim in his office in Westminster.

We are all aware that pilot schemes are being run across England which enable therapists, hygienists and dental health educators to play a greater role in delivery of dental care. Yet, there is still uncertainty over whether we will be allowed to see patients directly as a result of

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the reformed contract after 2020. We are also uncertain if we are to be allowed to administer prescription only medicines without a patient specific or patient group directive. My personal view is that Dental Therapists have been safely practicing aspects of dentistry since 1909 (if you include dental dressers). We have also prescribed and administered local anaesthetic for decades.

What more do we have to do? The academic evidence base is available to support our role, yet, since the New Cross girls led the way after 1960, it's been a struggle:

- to be accepted
- to be able to treat patients in all sectors of dentistry
- to administer local anaesthetic
- to provide pulp treatments on deciduous teeth
- to work without a dentist being on the premises

- to open our own dental practice
- to take / prescribe radiographs
- to see patients directly, and now today we are STILL fighting to be able to carry out our full scope under the NHS contact!

The barriers we have to face could easily be interpreted as blatant discrimination and protectionism, although few in power would admit it. GDC educational outcomes for every training establishment are exactly the same for all undergraduate dental training so within scope we are no different from our fellow general dental practitioners. Yet we are often seen as second rate clinicians, paid at a much lower rate and as therapists we are not encouraged to fit neatly within the dental team.

Armed with evidence based papers on use of therapists worldwide (thanks Joanne Bowles and ex BADT president Leigh Anne Randall) we at last had an opportunity to place our colleagues on the parliamentary map. Mr Farron had done his homework and was aware of the problems of the contract and shared his concerns over

access to dental care in his constituency. He also acknowledged the struggle is nationwide. He listened, made notes and was sympathetic to our cause and pledged to take the matter forward to the relevant people.

He was most impressed by the commitment of two dental therapists who had willingly given up a day of their working week at short notice and voluntarily travelled to London (from Liverpool and Manchester) to put their case.

We now wait to hear if further progress is to be made but at least we are satisfied we have been listened to without prejudice, and have made the case for dental therapists to be part of the team in general practice. I hope and wish for a day we are all treated equally within the dental team and respected for the skills we have. All we want is to care for patients and place their interests first.

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