clinical dental technicians:

OUT OF THE SHADE

Peter Meeds, Chairman of the Clinical Dental Technicians Association, gives an insight into the introduction of this new class of PCD.

As I write this, the Section 60 Order is imminent encompassing the aspirations of thousands of people working to a large extent unregulated in dentistry.

Dental nurses, dental technicians, dental therapists, dental hygienists and two newly created groups; orthodontic therapists and clinical dental technicians (CDTs) will all be required to register with the General Dental Council.

Assuming all goes well, this new statutory register for PCDs will open in Spring 2005.

The elderly present the largest demographic group treated by CDTs and patience and a caring nature coupled with a high degree of technical and clinical ability are prerequisites for a competent clinical dental technician.

Clinical dental technicians already exist in many other parts of the world and are known by titles such as dental prosthetists, special dental technicians and denturists.

Clinical dental technicians first train as dental technicians (usually on a day release basis over four to five years, by full time study at college or by degree route) and undergo further training (approximately two years) to become clinically competent to

provide removable dental appliances. As a profession it is somewhat unique in that it combines both technical and clinical skills.

Presently there are no courses for clinical dental technology in the UK although several training providers are believed to be interested in running schemes once the legislative process is complete.

The Clinical Dental Technicians Association provides education to competent dental technicians in the UK and Republic of Ireland via George Brown College, Toronto, Canada who have been training CDTs for the last 25 years.

The course mirrors the curricula framework for CDTs set by the General Dental Council and we are currently undergoing accreditation by City & Guilds Affinity and the Royal College of Surgeons of England for recognition, as a UK qualification, of the Canadian based programme.

In some ways it is true to say it is not a new profession, indeed it has been estimated that 600,000 dentures are provided illegally by dental technicians in the UK and dentures have been provided by such people since Egyptian times - 80 per cent of those registering as dentists under the grandparent clause in the first Dentists Act 1921 were, in fact, dental mechanics (now dental

technicians).

The General Dental Council has been the catalyst for uniting and modernising the regulation of the dental profession and bringing in new registered professionals to meet the increasing demand for high quality NHS and private dental treatment. The process has also brought together many representative associations with wide and diverse views to reach a point where all members of the clinical dental team will be registered under one body - a unique achievement.

All future registrants will be subject to mandatory continuing professional development, defined scopes of practice and strict ethical guidance. This will be coupled with much stricter fitness to practice procedures, revalidation and tighter professional conduct penalties. Further, the General Dental Council will be introducing a new NHS and Private Patient Complaints Scheme to enhance its role in protecting the public.

At the end of all these processes, the UK will have achieved what is possibly the best regulated dental team in Europe and probably the rest of the world - all in the interests of delivering a high quality service and wider access to services for dental patients.