RESEARCH SUMMARY

Attitudes to CPD in Scotland

Attitudes and trends of primary care dentists to continuing professional development: a report from the Scottish dental practitioners survey 2000 **M. Leggate and E. Russell** *Br Dent J* 2002; **193**: 465–469

Objectives

To describe the current and intended continuing professional development activity of dentists in general and community practice.

Methods

A cross-sectional, semi-structured questionnaire was sent to all general practice and community dentists identified from the dental practices division as being in practice in Scotland. The issues addressed included personal demographics, current working patterns and job satisfaction, training and professional development and finally career and working intentions.

Results

Of the 1,917 questionnaires sent to general dental practitioners (GDPs), 1,357 were returned useable (70% response rate); 212 of the 283 questionnaires to community dental practitioners (CDPs) were returned giving a 75% response rate. Of the responders, 89% of GDPs (1,188) and 95% of CDPs (178) reported participating in some form of CPD in the preceding year. One sixth of GDPs (211) and one third of CDPs (62) had a further qualification. Short courses such as Section 63 were very popular with over 90% of GDPs, but more than half the respondents did not think that further qualifications would enhance their career prospects. The most commonly identified barriers to further qualifications were heavy clinical commitments (78%), with 73% citing the substantial cost with no additional benefit. Over a third of GDPs under the age of 30 indicated they intended to sit a postgraduate qualification. This fell to 12% for those aged over 30. Only 18 dentists were identified on a career break.

Conclusion

Two years before implementation of the General Dental Council's mandatory revalidation scheme, over 90% of Scottish primary care dentists reported active participation in CPD. Future initiatives must be sufficiently sophisticated to fulfil the educational needs of different age groups, and to focus on part-time and career break dentists as well as full-time practitioners. It is important to establish career pathways in dental primary care. Part-time modular courses such as Masters degrees in primary care based dentistry may be one solution. An increased number of part-time posts for primary care dentists in secondary dental care may increase the skill base and also increase service provision in secondary care establishments. These pathways should create an opportunity to adequately reward those who continue to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for a technically demanding healthcare profession.

IN BRIEF

- This paper reports on a wealth of descriptive information gathered from the first national survey in Scotland of primary care dentists declared preferences for appropriate CPD.
- For those involved in the planning and provision of CPD this will enable more targeted delivery of education provision and more focussed studies on effective educational methods for dentists.
- The reader has the opportunity to look at trends in preferences based mainly on age and gender, and there are many interesting differences.
- Career pathways for primary care dentists are uninspiring at present. Suggestions for linking CPD with long term career development are explored.

COMMENT

Primary care dentists' attitudes to continuing professional development formed a major part of the 'Toothousand Project' ¹ Survey of General and Community Practitioners in Scotland, the other part investigating workforce issues is the subject of another paper.² The authors have condensed the results of a very extensive questionnaire into a more accessible format. This particular paper sets out to determine the uptake of CPD in Scotland and whether the current options are those that primary care dentists want, information that until now has been lacking.

The overwhelming majority of Scottish dentists undertake some form of CPD with 72% of GDPs and 85% of CDPs achieving the GDC's requirement of 15 hours. More than a quarter reported undertaking 39 hours or more. 'Hands on', lectures and small group tutorials were the preferred learning styles of the dentists, especially SCPMDE's Section 63 and CDS short courses which are accessible and convenient. Young and women dentists are more likely to favour a more participative style than older male dentists. Whether all this activity is appropriate or effective in leading to improved practice was not addressed by this survey and would require further investigation. There was a very strong support for professionals complementary to dentistry to be included in CPD.

Postgraduate qualifications are held by over a third of CDPs in Scotland and 16% of GDPs, and are regarded as a method of improving skills rather than career enhancement. If postgraduate qualifications are to be made more popular then incentives to undertake training and a more flexible approach to delivering it are needed. The requirements of practitioners in busy practices as well as those in remote and rural areas must be considered. A flexible modular approach to building up further qualifications is advocated, especially for older practitioners who may find formal training pathways difficult to fit into an existing lifestyle. This would certainly be more inclusive and deserves further consideration as a method of encouraging effective postgraduate development.

The plight of dentists on a career break or working part-time is also highlighted. In order to facilitate their much-needed return to the workforce there needs to be a more flexible method of allowing access to CPD.

This is a very timely paper providing much needed information on the attitudes of the dental workforce in Scotland and should help inform the debate on creating an infrastructure and incentives that will maximise the current workforce.

Robert Hamilton

Senior Dental Officer, Grampian Primary Care NHS Trust

1. SCPMDE. *A Scottish Survey of general and community dental practitioners 2000, The Toothousand Project*
2. Russell E, Leggate M. Dentists in General and Community Practice: A Scottish Survey. *Br Dent J* 2002 193: 333–337.