Send your letters to the editor, British Dental Journal, 64 Wimpole Street, London W1G 8YS or by email to bdj@bda.org
Priority will be given to letters less than 500 words long. Letters should be typed. Authors must sign the letter, which may be edited for reasons of space

Overseas dentists

Sir, I have read with interest recent articles regarding the recruitment of overseas dentists, with particular reference to dentists from India. Unfortunately in my experience the reality does not match the rhetoric.

I am a dentist born in India, though all my education has been in the UK. I qualified from Sheffield in 1975 and have practised in South Yorkshire since then.

Earlier this year a cousin who is in his late twenties, with an Indian dental degree and MFDS part A, wrote to me for advice regarding working in general practice in the UK. He understood that in order to practice here he would have to pass his International Qualifying Examination (IQE) for which there was a considerable waiting list.

As he was born in the UK he revoked his Indian nationality, took British citizenship, and duly arrived here in late April 2004. Because of the world wide publicity regarding lack of NHS dentistry in certain areas of Britain, a colleague involved in Vocation Dental Training in this area wondered if it would be possible to fast track him.

A place was available on the VDP scheme in Barnsley to start in early August pending the GDC giving my cousin full registration. His CV and details of his dental experience in India were duly submitted, but unfortunately in their wisdom the GDC turned down his application on the grounds of insufficient experience in general dental practice.

How is one expected to acquire experience in practice by being stopped from going into a supervised training scheme? Though very disappointed he has now passed part A IQE and is soon to take part B. Hopefully he will pass this, and then take part C this year.

After this he will be able to work in general practice without any further experience than he already had, and following a gap of nearly one year since he last carried out any dental treatment of any sort.

I have tried to help him as much as I can with regards part B, but there appears to be very little support available to help him pass his exams, e.g. practising restorative procedures on a phantom head, and he obviously cannot practise on patients.

He has been told recently that a training scheme for dentists sitting part C may soon be set up locally. I just hope that this is arranged in time to be of help.

In the meantime he is working extremely hard as a postman in Sheffield to earn enough income to keep him until he can start his chosen career.

S. Chaudhuri
Sheffield

Antony Townsend, Chief Executive and Registrar of the GDC responds: *Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Mr Chaudhuri's letter. I sympathise with his cousin's position, which is a complex one.*

The General Dental Council's purpose is to protect patients. We are responsible for ensuring that those who do wish to work here are properly trained, qualified and fit to practise.

We aim to register all dentists who meet these requirements as promptly as is consistent with public safety. Our procedures are designed both to protect patients and to be fair to applicants.

Under European regulations which came into force on 1 January 2004, dentists who are nationals of the European Economic Area (EEA) but whose dental qualifications are not EEA-recognised can now apply for full registration with the GDC. (Previously, dentists in this category had to first pass the GDC's International Qualifying Examination.) Registration is not automatic, however, and all applications via this route have to be individually assessed, taking into account the applicant's knowledge, experience and qualifications.

If, on paper, an applicant appears to have inadequate knowledge or experience, we cannot grant them full registration. In these cases, to become eligible for full registration, they must sit the International Qualifying Examination

(IQE) and demonstrate to us practically that they meet our required standards.

There is also the option of applying for temporary registration. Temporary registration allows a dentist to practise in supervised posts for training, teaching, or research purposes. Dentists with temporary registration cannot currently work in primary care.

However, as Mr Chaudhuri mentions in his letter, we are setting up a pilot scheme which will allow temporary registration to be granted for practice in the primary care setting.

The pilot will be run this year for five selected dentists who have passed Parts A and B of the IQE. It will be run in five approved practices and will last six months. At the end of the six months the Council will look at the results and make a decision on the future of the scheme.

Mr Chaudhuri is concerned that there is a lack of revision courses available for IQE candidates.

There are a number of training providers offering courses and, although we cannot approve or recommend individual courses, we can provide details of those training providers. Mr Chaudhuri's cousin should get in touch with our IQE team for a list (email: examinations@adc-uk.org).

Finally, to address Mr Chaudhuri's point on the IQE waiting list.

Waiting times for the IQE have been too long. However, thanks to support from the dental schools (which hold the exam) and special funding from the Department of Health (England), waiting times for all three Parts of the IQE have been significantly reduced.

We have more than doubled our capacity in the past year; and we are also working with the dental schools to establish new, more flexible arrangements for holding the IQE exams after April 2005.

The aim is to secure dependable provision for large numbers of candidates and keep waiting lists to a minimum. Good progress has been made on the new system and full details will be announced later in 2005.

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