

Dentists hail Council action

The British Dental Association has welcomed leadership from Cornwall Council as it voted to take action over the growing access and recruitment problems facing NHS dental services across the county.

A cross party group of councillors led by independent Loic Rich has cited new NHS England data showing over 48,000 patients on NHS waiting lists in Devon and Cornwall – facing average waiting times of 477 days. Just 18,508 were on waiting lists in January 2016, facing average waiting times of 357 days. The BDA has contacted a leading recruitment agency that has been unable to fill a single vacancy in Cornwall in the last 12 months, with even ‘golden handshakes’ insufficient to attract candidates to the area.

BDA analysis of nhs.uk has shown patients in Bodmin face round trips of up to 65 miles to Redruth to find practices able to accept new adult NHS patients. Patients in parts of Cumbria face journeys of up to 90 miles.

The UK government has failed to honour commitments made since 2010 to make a decisive break from the discredited 2006 NHS contract system which sets quotas on patient numbers and has fuelled morale problems in the sector. Dentists are penalised

if they don't hit targets for activity, but are unable to treat extra patients even if they have capacity to do more.

Recent BDA analysis of the Government's GP Survey indicates over a million new patients tried and failed to access NHS dental care last year – nearly 22,000 in Cornwall alone. 43% of patients not on the books with an NHS dentist failed to secure access in the county – nearly double the average for England (22%).

The independent review body, the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDR), has been criticised by dentist leaders for recently describing the current recruitment issues as little more than ‘anecdotal’.

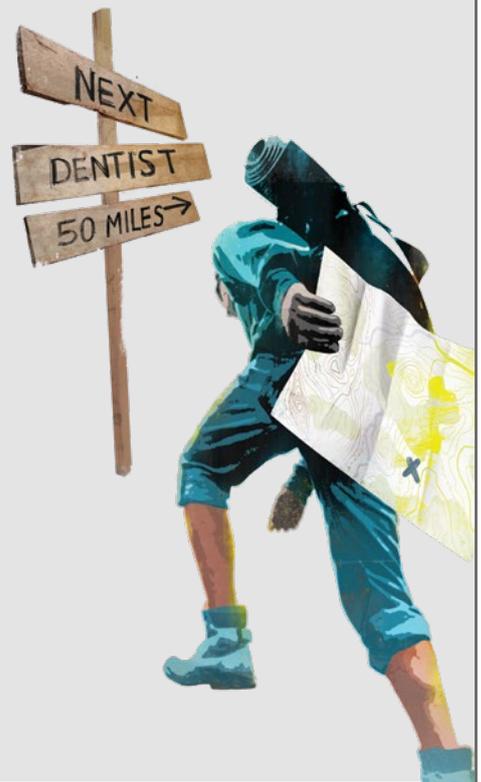
The BDA's Chair of General Dental Practice Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen said: ‘Councillors in Cornwall are showing the kind of leadership we really need to see from Westminster.’

‘The crisis in NHS dentistry is now hitting communities from Cornwall to Cumbria. Underfunding and a failed contract have left dental practices without dentists, and our patients are seeing the result.’

‘The official line is recruitment problems are just anecdotal, even though the government's own surveys show over a

million new patients tried and failed to access care last year.

‘Aren't a million anecdotes enough to make Ministers wake up to this problem?’



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Commitment to extending HPV vaccination welcomed

BDA Northern Ireland has welcomed official confirmation that authorities will extend the HPV vaccination programme to school-aged boys.

The move finally brings Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK. From September the HPV vaccine will be offered to all boys in year nine at school – around 12,000 in total. The vaccine was originally offered as protection from cervical cancer.

BDA Northern Ireland has led calls for a gender-neutral approach to the vaccinations, has been a leading partner in the UK-wide HPV Action coalition, and has worked closely with charity Cancer Focus NI to lobby the Stormont authorities.

HPV has emerged as the leading cause of throat cancer, especially among young

people. As one of the most rapidly rising cancers, oral (mouth and throat) cancer rates are set to double by 2035, and they are increasing more rapidly among men than women. The condition is linked to 5% of all cancers worldwide, including some that affect only men.

The BDA is now seeking clarity on whether the NI government will offer a catch-up programme to older school boys, in line with the approach that was followed across the UK when the vaccine was first rolled out to girls in 2008. Over 45,000 boys could miss out on coverage without a catch-up programme, at a time when uptake among girls is falling, further jeopardising the chance of ‘herd immunity’. Westminster has thus far refused to give ground, leaving 1.2 million older boys

without cover in England.

Roz McMullan from the BDA's Northern Ireland Council said: ‘Extending the HPV vaccination programme will save lives and provide all our children with the best possible defence from this cancer-causing virus.’

‘Oral cancer now claims more lives than car accidents in Northern Ireland, and cases are skyrocketing. Dentists are on the front line in this battle, and we've fought hard to see prevention put into practice.’

‘While Northern Ireland is the last UK administration to sign up to jabs for the boys it still has a chance to show leadership. Commitment to a catch-up programme for over 45,000 older boys would send a clear signal that NI is willing to walk the walk on both equality and prevention.’