

NEWS FROM THE BDA

'GP at Hand' style apps offer no quick fix to NHS access crisis

The BDA has expressed scepticism over the role of tele consultations in dentistry, following the launch of the new app Tooth Fairy. While recognising use for this technology in areas including triaging cases for NHS 111, it does not see how it is possible to conduct a full and thorough examination remotely on the basis of current technology.

The BDA have expressed discomfort over the facility to provide 'prescriptions on demand', potentially for painkillers and antibiotics without the benefit of a full diagnosis. Antibiotics do not cure toothache, and unnecessary prescriptions are contributing to the growing problem of antimicrobial resistance.

They have called on Ministers to not rush to endorse tele consultations – previously seen with controversial apps such as *GP at Hand* - without a full evaluation of their effectiveness and implications on patient safety. The BDA has also said such technology offers little hope of meaningfully addressing a deteriorating access situation.

British Dental Association Chair Mick Armstrong said: 'It's wishful thinking to imagine any app offers a quick fix for millions of patients struggling to secure an NHS dental appointment.

'When you're in the chair your dentist can use a mirror to see the back of your mouth, will touch and probe teeth and gums, and can offer x-rays to identify unseen problems. It is difficult to see how a thorough examination could ever be replicated over a smartphone.

'Yes, technology is having a transformative impact on health services, but it should not be a route for prescriptions on demand, potentially without a full diagnosis.

'Government must not make the same mistake it did with *GP at Hand*. Patient safety must come first, and we need to see a robust evaluation before we hear a ringing endorsement from Ministers.'

NEWS

Campaign to alert patients to dangers of 'DIY Ortho'

The British Orthodontic Society has announced a partnership with the Oral Health Foundation to launch a national campaign to warn patients about the risks of direct-to-consumer orthodontics – also known as DIY Orthodontics.

The announcement, made at the British Orthodontic Conference, will also provide patients with expert information that relates to their oral, orthodontic and overall health. By bringing the expertise of the two organisations together on this issue it will empower patients to make the right choices.

Jonathan Sandler, BOS President, said: 'In my professional opinion, if you embark on any orthodontic treatment without a suitably trained clinician taking the time to examine you and make appropriate recommendations, you could be in danger of having serious conditions missed, as well as inappropriate and dangerous treatment carried out.

'For me, one of the issues with 'DIY orthodontics' is that it offers just one narrow solution when there may be a more appropriate one for the patient. The value of informed choice cannot be over-estimated.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation said: 'As the demand for adult orthodontics increases, so do the options for patients. We are seeing a growth in online companies offering orthodontic treatments at significantly reduced prices. For many patients, it will feel like a sensible consumer-savvy choice. But this may not be the case.

My clinical view is that orthodontics should always involve face-to-face contact with a trained clinical professional. This is to ensure patient safety and the most effective treatment.

'When carried out correctly, orthodontic treatment can give patients the straight and confident smile they have always dreamed about. We want to make sure that patients are given the very best advice about the safest and most effective way to have

orthodontic treatment. This new campaign will make sure patients have a trusted space where they can see the most independent and impartial information available.

The American Association of Orthodontics long-held position mirrors that of the BOS and the Oral Health Foundation. They state that orthodontic treatment is a complex medical process and that it is in the best, and safest, interest of the public to have that treatment conducted under the direct and ongoing supervision of a licensed orthodontist.

Speaking at the conference, Dr Jay Bowman, talked about the landscape in the USA regarding DIY Ortho. He said: 'I share many of the same concerns about direct-to-consumer treatments as have been voiced by the American Association of Orthodontists, the American Dental Association, and many U.S. State dental boards and legislators.

'It is my opinion that comprehensive diagnostic records and an in-person examination should be performed prior to embarking upon treatment. I am also unconvinced that orthodontic progress follow-up and resolution of patient concerns can be handled only by so-called tele-dentistry. In other words, ask yourself, what other transforming dental or medical treatment would you undergo, without an in-person evaluation or supervision by a medical professional?'

In addition to the campaign, the BOS is currently exploring regulatory options in relation to this issue and hope that the appropriate bodies will take a patient safety led decision.

