

NEWS FROM THE BDA

Oral Health action groups a significant step forward

BDA Northern Ireland has welcomed an announcement by the Department of Health to establish two new groups focusing on the oral health of children and the elderly in Northern Ireland. However, any action will need to be accompanied by adequate investment and a commitment to address the needs of the dental workforce if it is to be successful.

Chief Dental Officer Simon Reid made the announcement speaking at a BDA Oral health *matters* symposium at Stormont on 17 October, a landmark event calling for a new vision for oral health in Northern Ireland. The day attracted a capacity crowd of key stakeholders including Health Spokespersons of the main political parties, the Older Person's Commissioner, policymakers, advocates, leading public health organisations and charities.

BDA Northern Ireland has campaigned over many years for action to deliver improved oral health outcomes in Northern Ireland in particular for children and the elderly. The current Oral Health Strategy is now 12 years old, having been launched in 2007.

According to the latest Child Dental Health Survey which was published in 2015, just 19% of 15-year olds here were considered to have 'good oral health'. In 2017/18 almost 5,000 (4,724) children faced tooth extraction under General Anaesthetic (GA) in Northern Ireland (x3 times pro-

rata than England).

BDA Northern Ireland has also highlighted the mounting pressures on dentists to meet the mounting challenges from a growing ageing population that is increasingly retaining some natural teeth into old age.

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland recently called for urgent improvements to be made to oral care provision for older people in Northern Ireland alongside the Children's Commissioner who has called for more to be done to tackle oral health inequalities to give children the best start in life.

BDA NI Council Caroline Lappin said: 'The news that two new Oral Health Options groups are to be established by the Department of Health focussing on how to best address the significant oral health challenges we face, is welcome news. We want to work towards improved oral health outcomes for the most vulnerable cohorts of our population.'

'These new focus groups give dentists an opportunity to work collaboratively with Department of Health and HSCB colleagues to generate ideas to deliver much needed advances in the population's oral health. Today's announcement builds on the important groundwork done by the BDA, DoH and HSCB to get us to this point.'

'The pressing needs of the local dental workforce will have to be factored in if this

work is to ultimately succeed. Our community dental service is already unable to meet the existing demand for oral health care – while general dental practitioners are increasingly struggling to make health service dentistry a financially viable proposition. Whatever options are generated, additional investment to bolster oral health in Northern Ireland will be necessary. Going forward, improving oral health must be viewed as integral to embedding the prevention agenda, and delivering wider public health benefits to the population.'



L-R: Roz McMullan, Simon Reid, Caroline Lappin, Michael Donaldson

New dedicated mental health support for NHS dentists welcomed

The BDA has welcomed the Health Secretary's announcement that dentists in England will at last have access to a comprehensive mental health service, on par with doctors.

Matt Hancock said that NHS dentists and doctors in England will have 24/7 access to confidential advice and support through NHS Practitioner Health if they have faced a stressful incident at work or feel they are struggling with their mental health. The service is currently staffed by 200 experts whose training is tailored to understand the specific circumstances of clinical life.

The BDA has long campaigned for such a service for dentists and last month launched a partnership teamed with Health Assured to provide all BDA members with a 24-7 comprehensive and confidential counselling service.

BDA Chair, Mick Armstrong, said: 'The BDA's research over the past decade has consistently shown that many dentists experience unacceptably high levels of stress, with little or no formal help from government until now.'

'Our researchers collected hard data on the worrying extent of stress and burnout in the profession and the factors that place dentists at risk.'

'We used this evidence to make a compelling case to ministers that they could no longer ignore the mental well-being of dentists, whilst at the same time expecting them to deliver high quality care to patients.'

'For too long practitioners in desperate need of support were either expected to suffer in silence, or struggle to access basic services, resulting in too many dentists exiting the profession early, or worse.'

'We're very pleased that the highly regarded, confidential NHS Practitioner Health Programme has now been extended to all NHS dentists across England, and the stigma and barriers to seeking help through mainstream NHS services have been removed.'