

## GDC strategic goals must consider registrant mental wellbeing

Dental Protection has urged the GDC to ensure one of the key pillars of its three-year strategy includes reducing the impact of a fitness to practise investigation on registrants' wellbeing.

In its response to the GDC's consultation on its strategic plan for the next three years, Dental Protection welcomed the second strategic aim to 'ensure concerns are addressed effectively and proportionately to protect the public' but it said proportionality is also integral to the wellbeing of registrants.

Dental Protection has called on the GDC to ensure this strategic aim considers

registrant wellbeing and helps to address the level of fear that exists among dental professionals regarding a GDC investigation.

Dr Raj Rattan, Dental Director at Dental Protection, said: 'We agree that driving improvements to ensure the public's concerns are addressed effectively and proportionately should be one of the GDC's main strategic priorities. Dental Protection would like to work with the GDC on this aim, in particular on the desire to move towards a system which resolves complaints with only the most serious being dealt with as a fitness to practise investigation.'

'Proportionate use of powers is integral not only in protecting the public but in protecting the mental wellbeing of registrants who may find themselves being the subject of a complaint to the regulator. We believe that reducing the stress of a fitness to practise process is a key tenet of the GDC being perceived as fair and proportionate and therefore should form a key part of this strategic aim.'

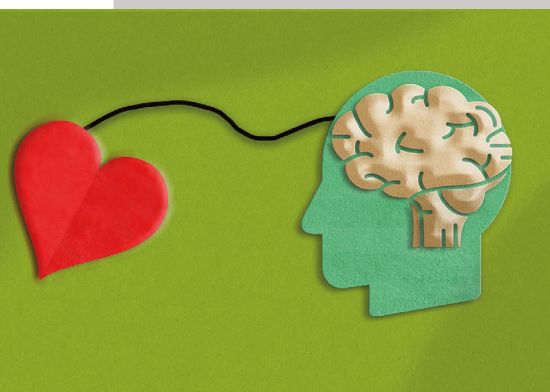
'The level of fear that exists amongst dental professionals regarding the GDC is concerning. In a recent survey of early career dentists

nearly a third told us they worry about a GDC investigation always, most of the time, or frequently. Fear does not support a culture of openness and learning; something all healthcare professionals should seek to foster. In respect of the GDC, this fear appears to stem principally from the fitness to practise process.'

'We appreciate the GDC is making improvements in this area, but we hope more can be done. For example, we believe the GDC could explore how initial contact is made with a registrant to reduce the stress from what will always be an unpleasant letter to receive. A review of its style guide, perhaps considering best practice across regulators, could also be implemented as part of its strategic aim.'

'While we understand certain legal information must be imparted to registrants, the tone and language of some written communications can cause unnecessary distress, overwhelm, and impact on mental wellbeing. Tone and language are also useful tools in creating a sense of proportionality. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the GDC to enable further progress in this area.'

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## Cuts to lifeline supporting HS dentistry puts future of service in doubt

Dentists have warned that cuts to vital financial support for Health Service practices undermines the survival of the service.

The Rebuilding Support Scheme, introduced in April this year applied a 25% uplift on fees paid for health service treatments to help dental practices recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Officials have now confirmed support will be cut back to 10% from next month. The cuts in support take place at a time of soaring expenses for high street practices and threaten the survival of the service. The growing disconnect between treatment fees and the actual cost to deliver Health Service dentistry in Northern Ireland has reached crisis point, leaving many dentists delivering certain treatments at a financial loss.

While BDA recognises the efforts that the Department of Health has made to support the service over the pandemic, it has stressed that with mounting costs in a service that was under serious financial

pressure pre-covid, there is now a 'perfect storm'. With dental inflation in excess of 12% practices will not be able to sustainably continue to provide HS treatments.

Recent research produced in collaboration with the BBC revealed over 90% of practices are not taking on new adult patients with 88% not taking on child patients. The BDA stresses that access to Health Service dental care will be negatively impacted even further with these latest cuts, and that more interim investment, not less is needed to make General Dental Services sustainable. The professional body has sought to work constructively with the Department of Health to seek urgent solutions to the immediate expenses crisis, but at this stage no meaningful solution has been proposed and current support has been downgraded.

Ciara Gallagher, Chair of the Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee said: 'A lifeline that helped keep practices afloat has been cut and dentists are reeling at the

message that this sends regarding their futures within the NHS.'

'Practitioners face a perfect storm, with expenses on the rise and fees from government which do not cover the costs of delivering care.'

'We want to continue caring for our patients – but cannot do so at a loss. Like any business, dental practices, have to balance their books, meet payroll and fulfil their obligations to suppliers; when fees paid do not match costs to provide care, this is not possible.'

'If HS dentistry is going to survive, we need meaningful support until a new, fit for purpose contract is in place. At a time of widespread dental access issues, and when practices do not view HS dentistry as being financially viable, we are genuinely concerned at the impact on this vital public service from these latest cuts. We need extra investment, not less. Time and goodwill are running out.'