

Dentists tell Chancellor further cuts will kill NHS dentistry

Following Jeremy Hunt's emergency statement on the public finances, the British Dental Association has warned any further cuts risk destroying any prospect of saving NHS dentistry in England.

In an open letter to the new Chancellor, the professional body has stressed that without meaningful investment a reform process looks doomed from the outset, and that any further 'efficiency savings' will critically undermine existing dental providers and further erode access to the public.

Formal negotiations are yet to begin on reforming the discredited NHS contract dentists in England work to that is fuelling the current access crisis. The system puts government targets ahead of patient care, and caps spending to cover barely half the population. Minor 'tweaks' to the contract announced before the summer recess, will do nothing to improve access, or halt the exodus of dentists from the NHS and had no additional funding attached.

The BDA has long pressed for a decisive break from this failed contract, recently dubbed by Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee as 'not fit for purpose', underpinned by sustainable investment. It warns that the government's objectives to improve access and boost retention simply cannot be achieved within the historic

financial constraints set by the Treasury. Dentist leaders warn another period of austerity will leave the service at risk of collapse. The BDA estimates it would take an extra £880m a year simply to restore resources back to 2010 levels.

In his former role as chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, Jeremy Hunt had been a leading advocate of reform in dentistry, and a fully funded workforce plan for the NHS.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Without fair funding for NHS dentistry, there was little scope to do more than rearrange the deckchairs as the ship goes down. New cuts will only speed that process along.

'Since the financial crash, dentists have faced cuts with no parallel anywhere in the NHS. There is simply no more fat to trim, short of denying access to an even greater proportion of the population.

'We never imagined we would need to defend the wholly inadequate resources currently offered to us. But it seems we must. However, the stark reality remains that sustainable investment is urgently required if we are going to bring this service back from the brink.

'In his former role, the Chancellor recognised the scale of this crisis. NHS dentistry is already on the critical list. Any further cuts will kill the patient.'

GDC launches consultation on updated learning outcomes and behaviour expectations in dental education

The General Dental Council has launched a 12-week public consultation on proposed changes to learning outcomes and behaviour expectations for education and training programmes leading to registration.

In addition to introducing the new terminology of 'safe practitioner' to describe newly qualified dental professionals, the proposals will introduce new areas of required behaviour and make updates to both clinical and non-clinical requirements that programmes must achieve.

GDC Head of Upstream Regulation, Ross Scales, said: 'Since the learning outcomes in Preparing for Practice were last reviewed back in 2015, there have been significant

shifts in both dentistry and wider society, and the proposed changes in The Safe Practitioner Framework very much reflect this. I'd like to thank the many stakeholders who have shared their views to date, and particularly those who contributed their significant experience and expertise to our reference group which explored feedback and research. We are now seeking broader views on our proposals and welcome feedback from all of those with an interest in dental education and training.'

To read the full proposals and respond to the consultation before 10 January 2023, visit www.gdc-uk.org/about-us/what-we-do/consultations-and-responses.

New device for early detection of gum disease

Researchers from the University of Birmingham are developing a rapid test for gum disease, and they expect the technology – a probe for use in point of care settings such as dental surgeries or pharmacies – to play a pivotal role in early detection of heart or lung disease, type 2 diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis.

Professor Tim Albrecht from the University's School of Chemistry and Dr Melissa Grant from the School of Dentistry devised a new technique that could provide a rapid and accurate assessment of both the presence and extent of gum disease from a sample of saliva that can be taken in any healthcare setting.

Their method consists of a specialised probe and a detector that provides a quantitative measurement of biomarkers that indicate both the presence of gum disease and its severity. The biomarker panel was identified and validated by a team of researchers at the university's Periodontal Research Group and published earlier this year in the *Journal of Clinical Periodontology*.

The researchers have received funding from the EPSRC Impact Acceleration Account to develop a prototype of this new device, which is expected to be available within a year.

Professor Albrecht said: 'We believe the device we are prototyping will be the first dental probe that can identify periodontal disease in this way. It will detect periodontitis quickly and easily in a variety of healthcare settings, opening up opportunities for monitoring and early intervention in the patients with comorbid disease, who would benefit most from rapid treatment for periodontitis.'

Dr Grant said: 'The ability to detect and profile disease biomarkers in real time will allow monitoring for disease severity, and in particular the transition between milder and more severe forms of gum disease. This will benefit not only dental health, but also reduce costs and capture patients for whom periodontal treatment may, in the long run, be life-saving.'