

Government must turn page on Eleventh Hour pay cuts

The British Dental Association has said government's approach to pay is driving talent out of the NHS, as below inflation awards leave NHS dentists in England facing a drop in real incomes with no parallel in the UK public sector.

The Department of Health and Social Care has finally confirmed a substantially delayed uplift in contract values for general dental practice in England at 4.75% for 2022/23, reflecting a 4.5% rise in pay with an additional uplift applied for practice expenses. With inflation at an historic high, this corresponds to real terms cuts to the funding available to deliver NHS dental services and to pay associate dentists and other staff. Dentists in England have already seen their real incomes collapse by nearly 40% since the financial crash.

In conjunction with the BMA, the BDA has stressed that root and branch reform

is now required to give pay review bodies real independence. The government has interfered in the Review Body for Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration processes as a matter of course, imposing public sector pay freezes and pay caps, and by arbitrarily defining 'NHS affordability' each year.

The process has been dogged by interminable delay, with the government routinely providing late evidence. The pay uplift for 2022/23 is set to be implemented ten months late in February 2023, close to the end of the NHS financial year and backdated to April 2022. The political chaos and the resultant churn at the Department of Health and Social Care have been cited as excuses. Dentist leaders have stressed that this approach will only push talent out of the NHS.

Research undertaken by the BBC underlined the scale of the current

access crisis, with nine in ten practices reporting as unable to take on new adult patients on the NHS. The Health and Social Care Committee is now holding a dedicated inquiry, having been warned by the BDA in May that NHS dentistry in England faced a 'slow death', in the face of endemic recruitment and retention problems.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'England's dentists have just been handed an unprecedented pay cut at the eleventh hour. If Steve Barclay wants to win over NHS colleagues, he must turn the page.'

'Current pay review processes offer textbook examples of what not to do. Every dedicated health professional requires fair and timely pay uplifts. When so many are reconsidering their future in the NHS, to do otherwise is an act of self-harm.'

Doctors and dentists unite on pay review process that's unfit for purpose

Doctor and dentist leaders have set out a plan to restore independence to a broken pay review process that is driving talent out of the NHS.

The new British Medical Association report and its calls for reform are fully endorsed by the British Dental Association and represent the joint views of the medical and dental professions.

The report stresses that Ministers have interfered in the Review Body for Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRDB) processes as a matter of course, imposing public sector pay freezes and pay caps, and

arbitrarily defining NHS 'affordability' each year. It has left both medics and dentists facing the largest falls in real incomes in the UK public sector.

Publication follows talks on pay with Health Secretary Steve Barclay, which came just hours after the Department of Health and Social Care confirmed a real-terms cut for contract values for NHS general dental practice in England.

The pay review process has been dogged by interminable delays, with the government routinely providing late evidence. The pay uplift for 2022/23 in England is set to be implemented 10 months late in February 2023, close to the end of the NHS financial year and backdated to April 2022.

The professional bodies say root and branch reform is now needed to give the DDRDB real independence. Proposals include an end to the

'remit letters' from Ministers that dictate affordability at the outset, clear and enforceable timetables for the pay review process that all parties must adhere to, and powers to restore pay losses for the period where the review body has effectively had its hands tied.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Both dentists and medics bear the scars of a failed pay review process. 'Savage cuts to real incomes are the result of a system that's doled out pay caps and pay freezes to order.'

'The NHS will keep haemorrhaging talent until we see a body with real independence.'

Dr Vishal Sharma, chair of the BMA consultants committee, added: 'This report exposes the supposed independence of the pay review body as a sham designed to provide government with deniability whilst it directly meddles with pay outcomes.'

'Ministers cannot continue to argue that the DDRDB is independent while doctors' pay falls off a cliff and we have thousands of medical vacancies. If the pay review process is to have any hope in restoring the confidence of doctors and remedying the dire staffing shortages that we face across the NHS then it must be urgently reformed in line with its founding principles.'

