

NI Dental Practice Committee elects Ciara Gallagher as Chair

The Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee (NI DPC) has elected Ciara Gallagher as chair at its first meeting for the new triennium 2022-2025. Philip McLorinan and Helen Brogan were elected vice chairs.

'The next three years will be crucial for the survival of health service dentistry in Northern Ireland,' said Ciara. 'NI DPC has both challenges and opportunities ahead, as we embark on negotiations for a new health service contract for general dental services for our population.'

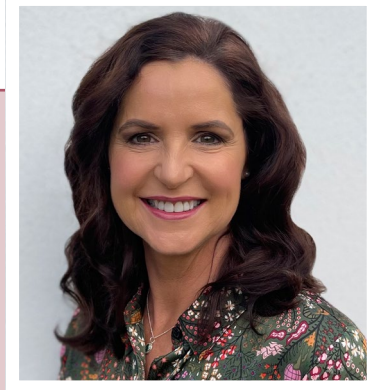
'The last few years have been particularly difficult for dentists and dentistry in Northern Ireland, navigating the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, while also managing the ongoing, day-to-day clinical and practical elements of running a dental practice.'

'I am conscious that I take up the reins from a worthy predecessor in Richard Graham, who steered the Committee through the worst of COVID-19.'

'With the full force and support of the Committee behind me, I am looking forward to leading health service dentistry into a new era, negotiating a new contract with the Department of Health, ensuring that we have a financially viable, affordable, secure, sustainable and safe future for health service dentistry in Northern Ireland.'

Ciara brings over 25 years' experience to the role of NI DPC chair. She qualified as a dentist from the University of Birmingham in 1996, working in Nottingham and Birmingham for two years before coming home to Northern Ireland.

She is now the sole owner of a seven-surgery dental practice in Downpatrick, where



family NHS dentistry and high-quality private implant and cosmetic dentistry sit comfortably side by side. Having worked in NHS dentistry for more than two decades, Ciara has felt first-hand the rising pressures of providing quality NHS care under an increasingly pinched budget.

She is a passionate believer that everyone should have access to quality dental care regardless of ability to pay. As chair, Ciara welcomes the opportunity for NI DPC to work closely and collaboratively with the Department of Health to formulate a new contract which works for patients, dentists and the government.

ENGLAND: FUNDING BOOST FOR NHS DENTISTRY IS ONLY PART OF THE SOLUTION

NHS England has pledged an extra £50 million for dentists to provide additional urgent care for NHS patients. Funding will be available until the end of March and will be paid on a sessional basis.

These new funds represent much-needed progress, but this time-limited package can only be the start when it comes to rebuilding NHS Dentistry and tackling an unprecedented backlog, said the BDA.

For the NHS GDS, the stated focus is new urgent care capacity. An enhanced sessional rate will therefore be paid for care provided before or after core hours. For community dentists, the indication is that this funding will be used to buy additional sessions to help deal with the growing backlog. We are developing advice for members about payment arrangements for this work.

With practices already struggling to hit gruelling targets, the narrow timeline will limit what is achievable in the short term. Given major limits on capacity across both GDS and CDS and the difficulties bringing

on new staff at short notice, we cannot be confident the full allocation can be used by the 1 April 2022 deadline.

But any additional funding offers some much-needed recognition of the challenges we all face, and this is the first new, albeit modest, investment in NHS dentistry in a generation.

'Any additional funding is long overdue recognition of the huge backlogs facing NHS dentistry,' General Dental Practice Committee Chair Shawn Charlwood said.



'After a decade of cuts a cash-starved service risks being offered money that can't be spent. Hard-pressed practices are working against the clock, and many will struggle to find capacity ahead of April for this investment to make a difference.'

'Until today not a penny of the government's multi-billion-pound catch-up programme had reached dentistry. This is progress but must be just the start if we are to rebuild a service millions depend on.'

NHS England have dubbed the new funding as supporting a 'treatment blitz' that will prioritise dental patients with learning disabilities, autism or severe mental health problems.

'Any 'blitz' will clearly face practical barriers' added Charlotte Waite, Chair of the England Community Dental Services Committee. 'At the bare minimum we have a commitment that recognises the needs of England's most vulnerable patients.'

'Well beyond 1 April we will need to see the resources and political will in place to meet them.'