

Charge hike ‘a slap in the face’ for hard pressed families

The British Dental Association has lamented the latest increase in NHS patient charges, stressing the hike will not put a penny in the cash-strapped service, and is merely covering for government cuts.

Charges in England will rise by 4% from 1 April 2024. This will mean the cost of a band 1 treatment like a check-up will increase from £25.80 to £26.80, a band 2 like a filling will increase from £70.70 to £73.50, and a band 3 like dentures will increase from £306.80 to £319.10.

Polling conducted by *YouGov* for the BDA last year found nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents in England delayed or went without NHS dental treatment for reasons of cost. 45% said the price shaped the choice of treatment they opt for. Entitlements to free care are limited, with many Universal Credit recipients not being eligible.

The BDA has long warned of the

Government’s long-term strategy of using charges as a substitute for meaningful state investment. NHS dentistry’s budget has been effectively static at around £3bn for the best part of a decade, with patient charges forming an ever-greater share of the total pot until COVID. Direct Government spend on dentistry was lower as the country headed into the pandemic than it was in 2010. The collapse in patient numbers at lockdown required Ministers to increase their contributions to maintain the viability of the service. Last year’s 8.5% hike saw the return to a fatally flawed ‘business as usual’ model as far as funding is concerned.

The recent NHS dentistry Recovery Plan claimed to offer £200m in investment. The BDA now understands that none of this is ‘new’ money, but is based on recycling vast underspends, the result of practices struggling to hit their punitive contractual targets. The Welsh Government has not

adopted the same strategy as England. The BDA has demanded that Ministers explain to the English public why they are expected to pay over £100 more for treatments like dentures than their Welsh cousins. In just a month over 170,000 people have joined a joint petition with the *Daily Mirror* and 38 Degrees calling for fair funding and real reform of NHS dentistry in England.

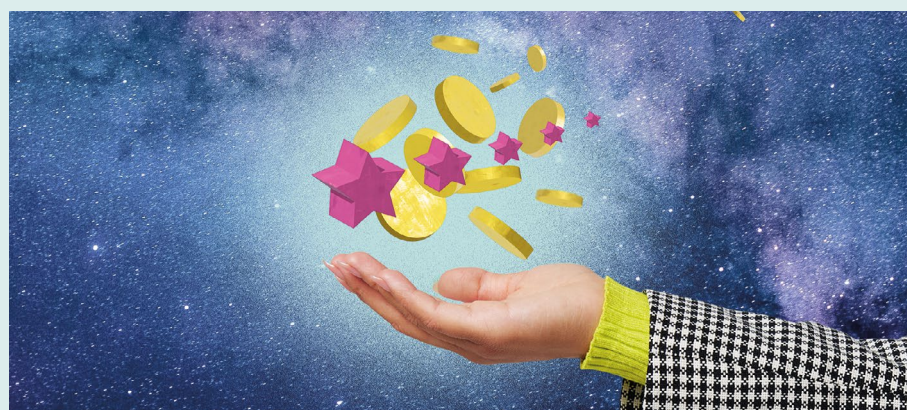
Shawn Charlwood, Chair of the British Dental Association’s General Dental Practice Committee said: ‘This latest hike is another slap in the face for hard-pressed families across England. This won’t put a penny in to bring NHS dentistry back from the brink. The Government is asking the public to pay more for less of a service.’

‘Ministers need to explain why patients in England are expected to pay £100 more than their Welsh cousins for identical NHS treatment. The answer is very simple. Ministers are simply covering for cuts.’

DLEF essay prize for 2024 launched

The Dental Law and Ethics Forum (DLEF) has announced the launch of its essay prize for 2024. This prestigious prize, now in its third year, is designed to inspire young dentists to engage with the dento-legal aspects of dentistry. The competition has three categories and the successful candidates will each be awarded £250 and given the opportunity to speak at the December meeting of the DLEF. The deadline for all three is 31 July 2024.

The category and essay title for final year students is ‘*Is it ever acceptable for a qualified*



Chris Morris

dental professional to discuss their religious beliefs with a patient?’ (Up to 800 words)

The DLEF is a group of influential people in the dento-world who meet several times a year for talks given by experts in the world of dento-legal and medical ethics. Established 25 years ago, the forum provides valuable opportunities for debate and networking. As well as the meeting on December 12th, the DLEF will hold meetings on 19 March, 13 June, and 24 September 2024.

Chris Morris, current President of the DLEF and dually qualified as a dentist and

a lawyer, commented: ‘The standard of entries last year was very high, and all three winners gave excellent presentations at our December meeting. The 2024 essay titles are again designed to explore reflection on contemporary issues which can arise in dental practice, and are the kind of topics that the indemnity providers regularly deal with.’

Full details of the prizes and how to apply can be found on the DLEF website The DLEF Essay Prize 2024 at www.dlef.org.uk/essayprize-2024/.