

DENTAL PROFESSIONALS RESPOND WITH DISMAY TO NUFFIELD REPORT



On 19 December 2023 the Nuffield Trust published its report 'Bold action or slow decay? The state of NHS dentistry and future policy actions'.¹ It states: 'NHS-funded dental services in England are in near-terminal decline: nearly six million fewer courses of NHS dental treatment were provided last year than in the pre-pandemic year; funding in 2021/22 was over £500m lower in real terms than in 2014/15; and there are widespread problems in accessing a dentist'. The report proposes a series of short-term actions relating to appointment recall intervals, commissioning and the workforce, and two approaches for longer-term action, which involve improving the current dental model or adjusting the NHS offer.¹

In response to the Nuffield Trust think tank's findings on NHS dentistry, the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN) responded with dismay that the authors of the report had consulted with the British Dental Association (BDA), which represents dentists, and the regulatory body, the General Dental Council (GDC), as well as with other organisations including the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health – but not with any of the other associations representing dental care professionals (DCPs).

'It is inconceivable,' said BADN Honorary President Joan Hatchard, 'that an organisation such as the Nuffield Foundation believes that oral healthcare in

the UK is delivered by dentists alone, has ignored the contribution of other members of the dental team, and has failed to avail themselves of the knowledge, expertise and skills of the professional associations representing DCPs in their attempt to identify, and provide solutions to, the difficulties currently facing NHS dentistry.

The Dental Professional Alliance (DPA) also released a statement. The DPA is made up of the Society of British Dental Nurses (SBDN), the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT), the British Association of Dental Therapists (BADT), the British Association of Clinical Dental Technology (BACDT), the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN), the Orthodontic Therapists Society (OTS) and the Orthodontic Technicians Association (OTA).

The DPA said: 'The Dental Professional Alliance is pleased to see the Nuffield Trust Report providing an overview of NHS dentistry in England, which draws on the Health and Social Care Select Committee's stance and points to the promised dental recovery plan.

'The Dental Professional Alliance is, however, keen to point out that dentistry and preventative care, are best designed and delivered with a whole-team approach. The number of dental professionals that the Dental Professional Alliance is representative of is more than 60% of all those on the General Dental Council register.

'Solutions to the problems affecting dentistry would benefit from the inclusion of all members of the dental team; failure to do so would be a wasted opportunity to utilise the knowledge, skills, and resources of these registered professionals and we would encourage their participation in future discussions.'

References

1. Williams W, Fisher E, Edwards N. Bold action or slow decay? The state of NHS dentistry and future policy actions. Policy briefing, Nuffield Trust, 2023. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/bold-action-or-slow-decay-the-state-of-nhs-dentistry-and-future-policy-actions> (accessed January 2024).

BDA backs breakfast club brushing plan

In January the British Dental Association (BDA) welcomed moves by Labour to roll out supervised brushing programmes in breakfast clubs.

Historic modelling from Public Health England indicates targeted schemes could generate £3.06 in savings for every pound spent in the short to medium term owing to reduced treatment need.¹



National programmes overseen by devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales have secured record breaking improvements in oral health, and elements have been adopted worldwide in countries ranging from Chile to Israel.

While some English local authorities have financed schemes, the UK Government has failed to even take forward historic pledges to consult on rollout.

BDA chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Supervised brushing is a tried and tested policy, that the Government's own modelling shows pays for itself.

'It's a scandal that decay remains the number one reason for hospital admissions among young children.

'Prevention isn't just better than cure it's cheaper too.'

References

1. Public Health England. Return on investment of oral health improvement programmes for 0–5 year olds. 2016. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80ee0bed915d74e6231403/ROI_oral_health_interventions.pdf (accessed January 2024).