

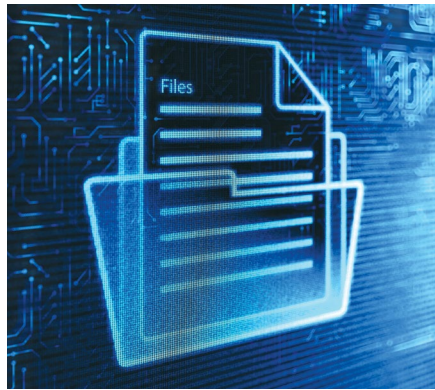
SNOMED disruption: urgent statement now required

The British Dental Association (BDA) has urged NHSX and the Office of the Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) to issue an urgent statement on the status of SNOMED CT, following updates instructing practices to implement the system from 1 September 2021.

SNOMED aims to ensure better interoperability between health services for patients, by ensuring clinical notes are coded in a standardised way. The planned implementation was postponed from 1 April 2021. The BDA had previously expressed grave concerns that the systems in place for its use in dental practices are not sufficiently robust at present to ensure patient safety and a smooth rollout that would not impact on time spent with patients.

The recent announcement came as a surprise to GPs and many major software suppliers.

Shawn Charlwood, Chair of the BDA General Dental Practice Committee, said: 'Since March, we have been engaging with NHSX, as advised by the Minister Jo Churchill, to resolve the outstanding issues



with implementation of SNOMED CT. In our meetings, NHSX has been clear that it did not regard it as necessary for dental practices to implement SNOMED from 1 September 2021 and that instead it wished to take the time to work with the BDA to develop a subset of dental-specific SNOMED codes that would be appropriate for use.

'It was therefore unexpected that NHS England and the Office of the Chief Dental Officer announced on 31 August that practices were expected to begin using SNOMED from 1 September.

'As a result, we sought urgent clarification from NHSX, as the NHS body responsible for SNOMED, as to what practices were required to do and we demanded a joint statement from NHSX and the OCDO to clarify matters. It is disappointing that there have been conflicting views from the two organisations.

'The BDA has been engaging with various NHS bodies including NHS England, the Office of the Chief Dental Officer, the NHS BSA and NHSX since it was announced in 2016 that storage of records using SNOMED CT would become a requirement.

'Our objective throughout this was to ensure that there was clear information about what implementation would entail and that the process for doing so would not disrupt practices' operation. It is regrettable that, despite our efforts, the various NHS bodies have not provided dentists, their practices and software suppliers with the clarity needed to implement SNOMED without such disruption. We will continue to press for an urgent statement from NHSX and the OCDO.'

Dentists call on NI Government to ensure service survives pandemic

The British Dental Association NI and 500 high street dentists have written to Health Minister Robin Swann to call time on the dire situation facing health service dentistry, urging the Department of Health to set out tangible solutions to overhaul the decades-old General Dental Services (GDS) contract.

Eighteen months on from the start of this pandemic, signatories state that many are now burned out and utterly demoralised, and that the present situation in health service dentistry has become intolerable and unsustainable. Dentists report they have been working harder than ever to meet more stringent infection prevention control measures but remain 'hamstrung' in the number of patients they can see in a day.

Many indicate they are now being pushed out of being able to continue to offer care under the NHS. Latest published figures show dental earnings in Northern Ireland have fallen once again, by an average of 4.2% compared with the previous year, or 36% in real terms for associates and 43% for practice

owners since 2008/09. Those with the highest commitment to health service dentistry (75% or more) have recorded the lowest earnings of all, averaging taxable income of £49,700 in 2019/20.

Practices are now facing huge challenges trying to recruit associates and dental nurses to provide health service care, and the growing public access problems that have resulted post-COVID-19. Health service dentistry has been on a downward trajectory for over a decade, with the service becoming increasingly financially unviable in its own right.

Dentists have urged the Department of Health to face up to the crisis in dentistry and come forward with concrete solutions aimed at modernising health service dentistry, and that addresses the terms and conditions associated with providing health service dentistry to safeguard its future.

Richard Graham, Chair of the BDA's NI Dental Practice Committee, said: 'We have reached a point where the majority of NHS-committed dental professionals are

feeling utterly demoralised, burned out and concerned for the future.

'Already, we see the difficulties patients have in being able to access NHS dental services. That situation will only be compounded many times over if dentists continue to see little hope that their decades-old contract model will be replaced with something that works, both for practitioners and the public alike. A 1990s activity-based contract model that was driven into the ground pre-COVID-19 has collapsed irreparably. We need an overhaul of GDS, and we need it urgently.

'Over the course of a weekend, almost half of GPs in Northern Ireland put their name to our letter to the Minister saying "enough is enough".

'Without a fundamental shift of trajectory away from a race to the bottom, and meaningful work on a new GDS contract that works better for the public and practitioners alike, health service dentistry will not survive.'