

Rights

Shaun Sellars continues this series on ethical dilemmas in dentistry which appears in every second issue of the *BDJ*.

As things stand today, on 1 December, the country is in a state of limbo, waiting to see if the new Omicron COVID variant is likely to change the course of the pandemic.

Understandably, the government are pushing the vaccination and booster programme as the first line of defence against ongoing widespread COVID outbreaks. Why are they doing this? Because we know that the vaccines are safe and effective.^{1,2,3} A booster provides incredible protection against the most severe effects of COVID-19.⁴ The anti-vax arguments that mRNA vaccines are experimental drugs or gene therapy have been dissected thoroughly and exposed as bunkum.^{5,6} Furthermore, as I predicted a while ago, they have gone as far as mandating healthcare workers, including dentists and DCPs, to be fully vaccinated to practise.⁷

Despite us already having similar requirements for other vaccinations and GDC standards requiring us to provide a safe environment for patients and manage the risks to our own health, the obligation for COVID vaccinations has caused something of a stir. The most common complaint I've seen is that this is against our human rights. Well, I'm here to tell you that it isn't.

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) provides the British public with several protections, initially outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights. These include the rights of privacy, freedom of expression and liberty, among others. Many are angry at the new directive, arguing that the current vaccine mandates violate these and other aspects of the law. But this misinterprets the law and the concept of human rights in general.

Most of the rights in the HRA are not absolute; that is, they can be restricted if certain conditions are met. For example, your right to liberty can be curtailed should you break particular laws, and your right to privacy can be waived if there is a significant public interest for it to be.

But many feel that our rights expand beyond those protected by law; that there is a fundamental right to be in control of what

goes into our bodies. Does the new vaccine mandate violate this? Well, no. Even if we do have an absolute right to control which medications we take, and not all of us do, we do not have a right to be a dental professional. Currently, unlike in Austria, there is no serious suggestion of compulsory COVID vaccination for UK residents – and it's unlikely that the current government would consider this unless the pandemic conditions worsen considerably.

The situation we have at the moment gives us all a choice: have the vaccine and continue practising dentistry, or leave – a stick, where maybe a carrot would have been more effective. But you're still able to express your scepticism of vaccination and you're still able to earn a living elsewhere.

There are issues with mandating vaccines for healthcare workers, not least that it's likely to compress the workforce issues we're already seeing. But a vaccine mandate, even if it's unpalatable, does not affect your rights in the slightest.

References

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New site for University of Bristol's Dental School

The University of Bristol's Dental School will move to a new site in 2023 after outgrowing its existing premises at the Dental Hospital in Lower Maudlin Street where it has been based for many years.

Planning permission has been granted for the University to refurbish 1 Trinity Quay in Avon Street, which is very close to Temple Meads Station and the proposed new university campus at Temple Quarter.

The new £27 million purpose-built facilities will provide students and staff with around 7,300 square metres of space and 119 dental chairs with the latest equipment across numerous clinics (artist's impression pictured).

A multi-disciplinary design team are redesigning the building to include clinical skills, prosthetics and dental production laboratories, dental clinics, teaching spaces, informal study spaces, staff offices and social areas.

In addition, free dental treatment for the local community by undergraduate students, under the supervision of qualified clinical dentists, will continue to be available.

The site was chosen after many months of searching, detailed analysis and site visits. Engagement on the new plans has been carried out with staff and student representatives, colleagues from University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation ►►



Trust, who run the Dental Hospital, Health Education England, Healthwatch Bristol and local NHS commissioners.

In addition to its existing teaching programmes, the new facilities will enable the Dental School to offer new courses including a Diploma in Dental Nursing which will build on the School's successful strategy to diversify by empowering and supporting prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds to access a university education, especially from the local communities.

The move will also mean the creation of new jobs including dentists, hygienists, therapists, nurses, technicians and support staff. The University will be launching a co-ordinated recruitment

campaign for this in the next couple of months.

Professor Jane Norman, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, said: 'The new model allows primary care services and training to take place in the most appropriate setting, allowing students to train at the most appropriate level with the majority going to work in primary care settings such as high street dental surgeries after they graduate.'

'Research will remain on site at the Dental Hospital, and strong partnership working between the University and University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust will also continue as we work together to develop a joint vision and future service model for dental education.'

