Bullseye

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

New year, new targets. Here we are entering 2022 with many of us facing the seemingly at odds positions of rising COVID infections, increasing NHS demands and reduced PPE requirements. So far, Omicron appears to be less severe but much more transmissible, leading to a potential shortfall in staff, and patients, due to self-isolation guidelines (which may have changed or been removed entirely by the time this goes to press).

However, the worry over Omicron is genuine, with the BDA reporting that in the run up to Christmas, around a third of dentists were still employing increased PPE when treating patients, despite new guidelines relaxing their use.¹ And now, despite increasing patient and staff absences, those dentists working in the NHS are suddenly expected to increase production to satisfy their contracts.

Dentists have reacted to the increased demand for production with disbelief and disdain. NHS statistics show that most practices are nowhere near the 85% performance figure required of them, and that's before taking into account the Omicron-related absence, both staff and patient, which is hitting productivity levels.² But is there more to the situation than meets the eye?

I'm no politician, but if I was, I might be concerned about the ongoing press reports of a lack of access to NHS dentistry. I may also be looking to cut the amount of taxpayer money spent on that dentistry. The current situation provides an excellent opportunity to achieve these seemingly contradictory aims in one fell swoop. Forcing dentists to see patients who have otherwise been unable to secure NHS care, and not only carry out emergency treatment but complete full courses to ensure contract payments, allows those in charge to claim

they've increased access to NHS dentistry. Under the new proposals, long-term attendees run the risk of facing access problems of their own. In addition, courses of treatment for those who haven't attended for some time are likely to be complex, requiring multiple visits for relatively fewer UDAs. Practices are less likely to reach their UDA targets and the NHS reserves stay healthy.

Politically, it's a win-win situation. Increased access, reduced expenditure. All that is needed is someone able to deliver the message and deal with the fallout, despite probably having little to do with the proposals. Legally, however, it's difficult to see how such unilateral changes to current contracts with minimal advance notice can be applicable.

The experience has left a bad taste in the mouths of many practitioners. We're already seeing reports of dedicated dentists moving away from the NHS to the private sector. Maybe this was part of the political plan all along? General dentistry has long been an expensive thorn in the side of the NHS. Perhaps this is the final political push to privatise the profession by the backdoor? Or produce a situation where only corporates can compete? As usual, it's those less able to afford private care that are unduly affected.

References

1. BDA. England: Omicron threat leaves dentists struggling to restore services. 2021. Available at <https://bda.org/news-centre/latest-news-articles/Pages/England-Omicron-threat-leaves-dentists-struggling-to-restore-services.aspx> (accessed January 2022).
2. NHS England and NHS Improvement. Key steps in 2022 to deliver for patients in NHS dentistry. 2021. Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2021/12/C1462-key-steps-in-2022-to-deliver-for-patients-in-NHS-dentistry-december-2021.pdf> (accessed January 2022).

New Year's Honours list 2022

The *iNews*¹ reports on recipients of the New Year's Honours list for 2022, including two dentists. Former National Lead for Dental Public Health, Public Health England, Sandra White is honoured with an OBE for her services to Dental Public Health and COVID-19. Iain Chapple, Professor, Periodontology and Head of Research, Institute of Clinical Sciences, College of Medical and Dental Studies, University of Birmingham and Consultant, Restorative Dentistry, Birmingham Community Healthcare Foundation NHS Trust receives an MBE for services to Oral and Dental Health.

Reference

1. Hughes D. New Year's Honours list 2022 in full: Everyone who has received an MBE, OBE, CBE, knighthood and damehood. *iNews* 5 January 2022. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/news/new-years-honours-list-2022-full-who-mbe-obe-cbe-knight-dame-difference-explained-1378053> (accessed 18 January 2022).

Professor Banerjee appointed *BDJ* Associate Editor

Professor Avijit Banerjee has been appointed Associate Editor of the *British Dental Journal*, with responsibility for leading a new project being developed for the journal to coincide with its 150th anniversary this year.¹

Professor Banerjee is Chair in Cariology & Operative Dentistry, Hon. Consultant/Clinical Lead, Restorative Dentistry (Guy's & St Thomas' Hospital Foundation Trust), Head/Chair of Dept, Conservative & MI Dentistry, Programme Director, MSc Advanced Minimum Intervention Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences, King's College London; Hon. Consultant Advisor, Office of the Chief Dental Officer, England; and Editor of *Oral Health & Preventive Dentistry*.

The *BDJ* team warmly welcome Avi on board and look forward to working with him.

Reference

1. Hancocks S. Happy birthday! *Br Dent J* 2022; **231**: 1.