

# Latest figures reveal depth of Scotland's access crisis



In January the British Dental Association (BDA) called on the Scottish Government to fix the broken system underpinning NHS dentistry, as new data<sup>1</sup> revealed little sign of a recovery in attendance and ever-widening health inequalities.

Figures from Public Health Scotland show participation rates – contact with a dentist within the past two years – continued to fall. On 30 September 2022, just 50.4% of all registered patients had seen an NHS dentist within the last two years, still down on the 52.6% seen in 2021, and a considerable reduction from almost two-thirds (65.1%) in 2020. The participation rate among registered children was higher than for adults (65.7% compared to 47.2%).

The gap between the most and least deprived areas in Scotland continues to grow, with the new data showing record inequalities in participation rates.

In September 2008, the gap in child participation between the most and least deprived areas was three percentage points; this had increased to seven percentage points by 2010, 18 percentage points (55.3% compared to 73.1%) in September 2021. The figure now stands at 20 percentage points (55.9% compared with 75.8%).

The BDA has warned that lower levels of participation will inevitably translate into a higher dental disease burden, with deep oral health inequalities expected to widen even further given the cumulative impact of limited access to services, the temporary suspension of public health programmes, and the impact of lockdown diets. Lower participation will reduce the chance of picking up early signs of decay and oral cancers at routine check-ups, and delays in treatment will mean higher costs to the NHS and worse outcomes for patients.

Registration rates remain high due to lifetime registration – over 95.4% of the Scottish population were registered with an NHS dentist in September 2022 – but the percentage of children registered fell marginally.

Free NHS dental for all remains a key Scottish Government policy. BDA Scotland has long warned that a return to a 'business as usual model' – low margin and high volume – will put practices under

unsustainable financial pressure, with soaring running costs raising the risk of closure or movement to the private sector. BDA Scotland stresses that Ministers must continue with additional financial support for practices, set to end on 1 April 2023, to support dentists and their teams as they work through the historic backlog of dental care and until a new, sustainable funding arrangement for NHS dentistry is in place. These data follow recent reports of a growing exodus of dentists from the NHS.

David McColl, Chair of the BDA's Scottish Dental Practice Committee said: 'Patients in Scotland's poorest communities are paying the price for the crisis in dentistry.

'The Scottish Government must not try to hide behind positive sounding registration figures. The reality is patient participation remains on the floor, and inequalities are set to widen.

'Dentists are reconsidering their futures working in a broken system. NHS dentistry is on the critical list, and real reform won't wait.'

## References

1. Public Health Scotland. Dental statistics – registration and participation. 24 January 2023. Available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/dental-statistics-registration-and-participation/dental-statistics-nhs-registration-and-participation-24-january-2023/> (accessed January 2023). ✦

## Dentist publishes book on resilience and wellbeing

Dentist Dr Mahrukh Khwaja has written a book called *Resilience and well-being for dental professionals*, designed to be essential reading for dental professionals and other healthcare workers wanting to build emotional resilience and positive mental health.

Dr Khwaja is a positive psychologist, accredited mindfulness teacher and the founder of Mind Ninja, an award-winning wellness start-up dedicated to improving mental health and resilience among dental professionals.

Dentistry is a high-stress vocation with elevated rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, suicidal thoughts and self-harm. Chronic workplace stress is a

growing concern as it can severely damage the mental health of dental professionals and negatively impact their ability to provide appropriate care. Psychological interventions have been shown to greatly benefit the wellbeing and emotional resilience of the medical and healthcare community, yet resources that provide preventative tools are limited.

Topics within the book include managing difficult emotions, mindfulness and self-compassion, training the brain for maximum happiness, developing a culture of kindness and gratitude at work, utilising a growth mindset when upskilling, harnessing positive leadership and using strengths with patients and at home.



A review of *Resilience and well-being for dental professionals* will be published in *BDJ Team* later this month. ✦