

NHS dentistry isn't working: PM pressed to act on access crisis at conference

With government yet to honour pledges for a rescue plan for the ailing NHS dental service, the British Dental Association (BDA) has taken the message directly to delegates at the Conservative Party Conference.

With host city Manchester joining the growing list of communities seeing patients queuing round the block to access care, the BDA has adapted the Party's iconic 'Labour isn't working' poster to underline the depth of the crisis now facing patients.

Last month in Leigh, Greater Manchester, daily queues starting as early as 4 am were reported outside the Avenue Dental Centre, which offers appointments to NHS patients on a first-come-first-served basis. This follows reports in August from Faversham, Kent, where a practice received 27,000 calls for just 60 NHS slots, and in King's Lynn which in May saw queues of more than 300 form from 4 am.

During last summer's leadership bid Rishi Sunak pledged to 'restore' NHS dentistry, with a vow to address the 'unprecedented pressure' the service is under. Minor tweaks to the discredited contract fuelling the exodus of dentists from the NHS were announced in July 2022 under the Johnson administration and finally rolled out in October 2022 under the Truss administration. No part of the PM's '5 point plan' – which included a pledge to reform contracts to keep dentists in the NHS – has since been taken forward.

Ahead of a bruising evidence session with the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee in April 2023, the government pledged a Recovery Plan for the service. Widely expected before summer



Dentists outside the Conference. (L–r) Jim Rochford (Secretary, Manchester LDC), Stuart Allan (Chair of the Greater Manchester LDC Federation), Shiv Pabary (Vice-Chair, BDA General Dental Practice Committee), and Adrian Moss (Chair, Stockport LDC)

recess, it remained unpublished as parliament broke for conference season. In July the Committee concluded its inquiry, describing the state of the service as 'unacceptable in the twenty-first century', and set out recommendations to government for real, urgent reform, alongside a call for the recovery plan to be underpinned by necessary funding. The Government's response to the inquiry has been overdue since 14 September 2023.

Analysis undertaken by the BDA of recent government data indicates unmet need for dentistry in 2023 stands at over 12 million people, up a million on 2022 figures, and now well over one in four of England's adult population. Over six million adults tried

and failed to get an appointment in the past two years, and 4.4 million simply did not try because they thought they could not secure one. Those put off by cost are now equivalent to over 1.1 million adults, those on waiting lists estimated at around 600,000.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'While Ministers drag their heels on a rescue plan, patients are queuing from the crack of dawn and many dentists are giving up hope of change.'

'Rishi Sunak ran for the top job with a promise to "restore" NHS dentistry, and so far that promise is being broken.'

'If this government fails to step up there may not be a service left to save.' ✦

BDA Dental Museum Necktie Archive launched

The British Dental Association (BDA) Museum is delighted to announce the launch of its Dental Necktie Archive website: www.bda-tie-archive.com. This freely available website, featuring the world's largest collection of dental ties (n = >350), is a unique resource providing many different insights into the history of dentistry over the last 100 years – available

evidence indicating that the first dental ties were introduced in the 1920s. As the search for more ties and related information to add to the Archive is ongoing, the website will continue to expand and evolve. It is hoped that this process will be facilitated by feedback from visitors to the website and those who join the already impressive list of donors to the Archive – the more ties the better!

The BDA Museum is pleased to make a contribution to grabatology and proud to add the Dental Necktie Archive website to its many different resources. It is hoped that the website will stimulate new interest in recording the rich history of dentistry over the last 100 years. Every tie generates a piece to add to the history of dentistry jigsaw. ✦