

Nuffield Report: Is NHS dentistry 'gone for good?'

On 19 December 2023, the Nuffield Trust published its report 'Bold action or slow decay? The state of NHS dentistry and future policy actions'.¹ It states: 'NHS-funded dental services in England are in near-terminal decline: nearly six million fewer courses of NHS dental treatment were provided last year than in the pre-pandemic year; funding in 2021/22 was over £500m lower in real terms than in 2014/15; and there are widespread problems in accessing a dentist'. The report proposes a series of short-term actions relating to appointment recall intervals, commissioning and the workforce, and two approaches for longer-term action, which involve improving the current dental model or adjusting the NHS offer.¹

Commenting on the Nuffield Trust think tank's findings on NHS dentistry, Professor Grant McIntyre, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery at The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, said: 'These recent findings by the Nuffield Trust on NHS dentistry raise significant concerns shared by many dental professionals across the UK.'

'It is imperative that the government promptly discloses the specifics of its dental recovery plan, with a strong emphasis on decisive and immediate support for the sector to protect patient safety.'

'The ongoing shortage of access to NHS

dentistry not only profoundly affects the dental health of the population but also poses alarming risks for the delayed detection of head and neck cancers.'

'The recent overhaul of the NHS dentistry payment system in Scotland is a positive step that could be emulated by other UK nations. Its new focus on prevention rather than reactive treatment compensates dentists for both aspects, addressing the mounting waiting list challenges within the NHS and enhancing access to dental care.'

'We advocate for similar moves across the UK, enabling dentists to operate within a system characterised by high trust and minimal bureaucracy. This approach empowers them to exercise clinical discretion in providing a comprehensive package of oral health promotion-based oral healthcare.'

The Dental Professional Alliance (DPA) also released a statement. The DPA is made up of the Society of British Dental Nurses (SBDN), the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT), the British Association of Dental Therapists (BADT), the British Association of Clinical Dental Technology (BACDT), the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN), the Orthodontic Therapists Society (OTS) and the Orthodontic Technicians Association (OTA).

The DPA said: 'The Dental Professional Alliance is pleased to see the Nuffield Trust Report providing an overview of NHS dentistry in England, which draws on the Health and Social Care Select Committee's stance and points to the promised dental recovery plan.'

'The Dental Professional Alliance is, however, keen to point out that dentistry and preventative care, are best designed and delivered with a whole-team approach. The number of dental professionals that the Dental Professional Alliance is representative of is more than 60% of all those on the General Dental Council register.'

'Solutions to the problems affecting dentistry would benefit from the inclusion of all members of the dental team; failure to do so would be a wasted opportunity to utilise the knowledge, skills, and resources of these registered professionals and we would encourage their participation in future discussions.'

References

1. Williams W, Fisher E, Edwards N. Bold action or slow decay? The state of NHS dentistry and future policy actions. Policy briefing, Nuffield Trust, 2023. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/bold-action-or-slow-decay-the-state-of-nhs-dentistry-and-future-policy-actions> (accessed January 2024). ✦

BFS opens applications for second Career Development Fellowship

The British Fluoridation Society (BFS), supported by The Borrow Foundation, is seeking to recruit a second candidate to its Career Development Fellowship.

Overall, £30,000 has been allocated for the provision of two British Fluoridation Society Career Development Fellowships. The first was awarded to principal dental surgeon Patrick Quinn in November 2023.

The BFS intends to appoint its second fellowship by March 2024 to start in June 2024, and is seeking applications from dental professionals at the beginning of their career with an interest in water fluoridation.

Dr Ray Lowry, BFS secretary, explains: 'This is an exciting career development opportunity for someone at the start of their professional career.'

'Water fluoridation plays a significant role in preventing dental caries and securing good dental health for all.'

'Despite its long history as a successful oral health intervention, only 10% of the UK population drinks fluoridated water, and these people are benefitting from schemes that were introduced decades ago.'

'Globally, more than four hundred million people have access to fluoridated water, and we are seeing an increase in political enthusiasm, including here in the UK, for more community water fluoridation schemes.'

'Together with The Borrow Foundation, we have identified a need to bolster the professional foundation for fluoridation to keep research relevant, and to encourage our younger colleagues to pursue the issue as a viable career interest.'

'Through our fellowship programme, we aim to help build a modern UK database of evidence and to encourage up and coming colleagues to engage in the subject. The BFS is the obvious organisation to initiate this sort of intervention as we work to support the next generation of fluoridation advocates.'

The successful candidate will have the opportunity to meet leaders in the field and work to develop a unique insight into water fluoridation and the issues surrounding it, using the fellowship funding and BFS international partnership networks.

The closing date for applications is 31 March 2024.

Applications and the information on the process is available at <https://bfsweb.org/career-development/>. ✦