

IN IT TO WIN IT?

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The BDJ Upfront section includes editorials, letters, news, book reviews and interviews.

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Just imagine, if there had been no BDA. Just reflect on the situation where we did not exist and had not invested in constant scrutiny of GDC considerations and knowledge of law and regulatory frameworks. In such circumstances there would have been no chance of a co-ordinated response to the imminent threats to our profession. There would have been no-one to meaningfully and methodically challenge those who would do the profession harm.

As I write this piece we are now in circumstances where the continued BDA pressure upon the English Department of Health has resulted in the reversal of a proposed policy to significantly cut the pay of foundation dentists. That policy was based upon flawed reasoning and confused justifications. Our challenge to a process that looked hasty and inconsistent with the principles of fairness has meant that 1,000 newly qualified dentists will enjoy the same pay rate as their predecessors and represents a total of £2 million returned to individual practitioners. This is an outcome that was thought by some to be unachievable. Indeed many of our young colleagues had begun to accept that this was a *fait accompli*. The dogged determination of the BDA team has allowed the right outcome to emerge and I am glad about that.

In saying that I am not seeking to rub anyone's nose in it. I am not seeking to crow. In fact, I congratulate the Department of Health for being big enough to accept that it made the wrong decision. All I want and all I think our profession wants is to be treated fairly and reasonably. I realise that the risk to foundation dentists' salaries has not gone away and that when round two comes there may be the threat

'I have heard people talking about a 'fighting fund', the BDA is the fighting fund...'

of even harsher cuts and challenges. But we really can only take one step at a time and the frank unfairness of the proposals as they stood needed to be challenged, and the expectations of this particular cohort meant that there was a fight to be had and a battle to be won. If a future cohort is threatened in a similar or harsher way, we will fight that battle too and the next and the one after that. It's what we are here for and it's what we do.

Of course, the even more far-reaching challenge facing the profession is the GDC's threat to raise the annual retention fee by 64% at a total cost of £11 million to the profession. In similar vein we have diligently and thoroughly evaluated that proposal. We have analysed the consultation exercise in great detail with the support of financial and legal expertise. And we have concluded that again there are major flaws in the reasoning. We have identified what we consider to be sloppy and incomplete justifications. We believe that this consultation needs to be evaluated independently. Having alerted the Secretary of State for Health and the Professional Standards Authority, we have now made our submissions to the consultation and have, once again, invited the GDC to change its mind. We have put it on notice that if it fails to do so, we intend to institute legal proceedings on behalf of the profession.

We believe that our submission demonstrates serious failings on the part of the GDC both in its own reasoning and in the way it has published the information. In the same way as we did with the foundation dentist salaries issue, we will pursue this as far as we can and for as long as our advisers tell us that

there is something to be challenged. So important is both the principle and the impact of this approach that we believe it is vital that the dental profession has its say and the GDC properly accounts for its actions. Again, this is about doing what is right and proper for the profession. It is about transparency, fairness and proportionality. These are things that decent regulators should subscribe to and observe – we are determined that the GDC commits to those principles.

The outcome of this challenge is now with the GDC and we await its conclusions with interest.

But the important thing is that we are there and we have been there throughout. Our continuing presence is down to the members who have joined and stayed with the BDA and put money in our collective account. In other places I have heard people talking about a 'fighting fund' and many have given their opinions on strategy and tactics. The latter we have listened to and been grateful for. The former confuses me. The BDA is the fighting fund. If we manage to persuade the GDC of what we believe is its folly, it will not just be BDA members who benefit; it will be all dentists. But it will be only BDA members who have funded both the fight and the possible result.

If you believe that these things are important; if you share my anger with heavy-handed and bullying impositions; and if you are a BDA member; I thank you for your contribution.

If you share these beliefs and you are not a member then maybe you have some reflecting to do – I would commend to you Martin Niemöller's famous war-time poem.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2014.762