

Dentists face 13% fee hike for care inspection

The main NHS watchdog the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is proposing a 13% rise in the fee dentists have to pay to be subject to the body's annual inspection process.

The CQC published its *Regulatory fees for 2019/20 – consultation* on 25 October 2018 in which it set out proposed new fees for regulation effective from April 2019 for GDPs, community social care and residential social care providers.

Plans would see GDPs face a 13% increase in fees – more than £100 for the average provider – from April 2019, while GPs will see their fees unchanged, although these rose for practices with two locations and larger patient list sizes earlier this year.

In its document, the CQC said it proposed to increase fees for the dental sector so that it collected £8 million – an increase of £600,000 across the sector. Broken down, this would mean the annual fee would rise from £837 to £946 for dentists with four dental chairs for providers with one location.

The last increase seen for the dental sector was in 2014-15, said the CQC, and then it decreased fees in 2017-18 on the basis that it was implementing a model based around risk assessment rather than a comprehensive inspection model.

'We anticipated that this would bear a lower cost than we had estimated for the comprehensive model,' says the report.

Its assessment of costs up to 2016 represented its best understanding at the time, but since then, the regulator had built a much more detailed model, allowing it to map its total use of resources much more accurately.

Using its current costing model, the CQC had assessed the costs of regulating the dental sector to be £9.5 million, which suggested it was currently 'under-recovering' CQC regulatory fees from April 2019 by over £2 million, hence the proposed fee rise.

For GPs, the CQC changed its fee system for 2018-19, by replacing the previous banding scale in favour of a formula that calculates each GP practice's fee based on list size and locations.

From April 2018, an NHS GP provider with one location and a patient list size of 5,200 saw their fee decrease from £4,526 to £3,473, but an NHS GP provider with two locations and patient list sizes of 10,000 and 8,300 at each of the locations saw their fee rise from £8,371 to £11,449.

The BDA said the proposed changes for the dental sector represented a wholly disproportionate burden, particularly on smaller practices.

The trade union argued that the CQC's own data on primary healthcare services since 2011 had consistently reported that dental practices, when compared with all other sectors, presented the lowest risk to patient safety.

The CQC currently inspected 10% of dental practices every year, and had found enforcement issues in only 2% of that group – just 0.2% of whole population.

The BDA said it wanted an urgent meeting with the CQC and wanted GDPs in England to respond to the consultation.



Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen, the BDA's Chair of General Dental Practice said: 'When time and again CQC reports show this profession is delivering the very best for our patients, it is baffling they're asking us to pay through the nose for them. There is frankly no justification why low risk, high quality care comes with such a high regulatory price tag.'

'Our compliance costs have surged by over 1000% in the last decade, and the sustainability of services has already been pushed to breaking point. Many practices will struggle to understand why they face inflation-busting fee increases for doing right by their patients.'

'We urge colleagues take this opportunity and spell out to the CQC what these extra burdens will mean for their practices.'

The consultation closes on 17 January 2019.

1. Care Quality Commission. Regulatory fees – have your say: Proposals for fees from April 2019 for all providers that are registered under the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (25 October 2018). Available at <https://www.cqc.org.uk/get-involved/consultations/regulatory-fees-201920-consultation?cache=> (accessed 29 October 2018).

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Help on hand for struggling dentists

Anyone within dentistry who is dealing with financial difficulties is being reminded that help is available from charity the BDA Benevolent Fund.

The BDA Benevolent Fund was established in 1883 and provides financial aid to dental students, dentists and their families in need, irrespective of whether they are in training, in practice, have left the profession or are retired.

The types of financial assistance on offer from the charity varies, but the Fund has recently supported people with the following:

- Regular monthly grants towards day-to-day living
- One-off assistance to meet a specific need

- Funding for those returning to work following a period of illness or because of fitness to practise proceedings – this may include help with retraining costs and professional fees.

People who need such help do not have to be a BDA member to request support from the Fund and all contact is confidential.

Each case is dealt with on an individual basis and the assistance provided is tailored to each person with a dedicated team trying to point the client in the right direction to access other support services where appropriate.

More information is available by calling 020 7486 4994 or visiting www.bdabenevolentfund.org.uk.