

Dental care for homeless issue attracts BDA controversy

Problems over how dentists provide care to homeless people have surfaced in a controversial debate in the national press recently involving BDA Chair Mick Armstrong.

Armstrong sent an email to a colleague that was mistakenly copied and sent to Labour MP Stella Creasy on the subject in which he made reference to homeless people as 'no-hopers' in the context of how the current dental contract makes it difficult to treat homeless patients.

The story was covered in some parts of the media including the *Guardian* newspaper¹ on 28 July 2018 and the *Huffington Post* and was also the subject of a piece in a *Nursing Times* magazine's 'Heroes and Villains of the month' article,² which referred to Armstrong in the latter capacity.

In the email, Armstrong is quoted as saying: 'These are difficult patients who rarely complete a course of treatment and attend irregularly if at all. If we took in all the no-hopers who ring us ... I suspect we'd miss our targets by a country mile.'

After an exchange with Creasy, Armstrong issued a statement saying: 'I regret the intemperate wording I used in my exchange with Stella Creasy. The language was inappropriate but born of the frustration that all NHS dentists in England feel working under a



BDA Chair Mick Armstrong

contract that's decisively failed both patients and practitioners.

'I work as an NHS dentist near Wakefield, and like many colleagues, I treat homeless patients, but it is not easy under the current contract. The NHS effectively caps the number of patients we can treat and fails to cater for those most in need. Dentists are desperate for a system that will allow them to put their patients first.

'The BDA has long championed vulnerable patients, and has argued to ensure that they have access to services that are really tailored to their needs. Sadly any headway seems impossible under the existing contract.'

Groundswell, a charity that helps homeless people, published a report³ in May 2017 which said that 70% of people reported having lost teeth since they had been homeless, with 30% experiencing dental pain at the time they were being interviewed.

The BDA said the current target-driven 2006 NHS dental contract provided funding for little over half the English population and high street NHS dentists faced significant barriers in treating homeless patients in particular, for example they were required to provide the NHS with an address for a patient.

The union has called for funding of dental appointment slots, especially for homeless people, which once booked, would be funded whether patients attended or not, so dentists attempting to treat these groups were not penalised; and changes to NHS forms to enable a dentist to be paid for delivering treatment where the patient does not have an address.

1. Crerar P. Homeless people make us miss NHS targets, says UK's chief dentist. *The Guardian* 28 July 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jul/28/homeless-people-make-us-miss-nhs-targets-says-uks-chief-dentist> (accessed on 21 August 2018).
2. Ford S. Who are our heroes and villains for July 2018? *Nursing Times*. 6 August 2018. <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/politics/who-are-our-heroes-and-villains-for-july-2018/7025490.article> (accessed on 22 August 2018).
3. Groundswell. *Healthy Mouths*. May 2017. <http://groundswell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Groundswell-Healthy-Mouths-Report-Final.pdf> (accessed on 5 September 2018).

MPs say relax rules over use of e-cigarettes to tackle 'deadly' smoking



Regulations over the use of electronic (e) cigarettes should be relaxed to encourage more use of these devices as a stop smoking tool and to help prevent cancer, according to MPs on an influential committee.

MPs on the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee published a report¹ on e-cigarettes on 17 August 2018

which reviews the current evidence base on the harmfulness of e-cigarettes compared to conventional cigarettes and current policies.

The report says that e-cigarettes are estimated to be 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes and are too often overlooked as a stop smoking tool by the NHS.

Therefore, regulations should be relaxed relating to e-cigarettes' licensing, prescribing and advertising of their health benefits, while levels of taxation and their use in public places be reconsidered.

MPs concluded that e-cigarettes should not be treated in the same way as conventional cigarettes. The two leading causes of mouth cancer in the UK are tobacco and alcohol.

During the Committee's inquiry into the subject, MPs had heard from witnesses giving evidence that e-cigarettes were not a significant gateway, including for young non-smokers, to conventional smoking and did not pose a significant risk through second-hand inhalation.

Around 2.9 million people in the UK currently use e-cigarettes, and it has been estimated that about 470,000 people are using them as an aid to stop smoking. ➔

« The Committee called on the Government to consider risk-based regulation to allow more freedom to advertise e-cigarettes as the relatively less harmful option, and provide financial incentives, in the form of lower levels of taxation, for smokers to swap from cigarettes to less harmful alternatives.

Overall, the MPs said they believed that the risk for smokers of continuing to use conventional cigarettes was greater than the uncertainty over the long-term use of e-cigarettes.

They recommended that, in order to gather independent health-related evidence

on e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn products, the Government should support a long-term research programme overseen by Public Health England and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, with an online hub making evidence available to health professionals and the public.

Norman Lamb MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, said: 'Smoking remains a national health crisis.

'E-cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes, but current policy and regulations do not sufficiently reflect this and

businesses, transport providers and public places should stop viewing conventional and e-cigarettes as one and the same.

'E-cigarettes are a proven stop smoking tool and, while uncertainties undoubtedly remain about their long-term health impact, failing to explore the use of e-cigarettes could lead to the continued use of conventional cigarettes – which currently kill around 79,000 people in England every year.'

1. Science and Technology Committee. E-cigarettes. 17 August 2018. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/505/50502.htm> (accessed on 5 September 2018).

Dentists working for corporates feel less in control

Associates working for dental corporates feel they have less control and autonomy at work, are less satisfied with their jobs and have lower morale compared to non-corporate associates, according to new research¹ published in this edition of the *BDJ*.

Researchers from the BDA compared associates in corporate and non-corporate practices to gauge differences at work, examine professional working in each type of employment, and develop an understanding of dental corporates and their impact on UK dentistry.

In 2015, the corporate dentistry sector in England was estimated to consist of more than 200 dental groups with nearly 2,000 practices and there are a number of larger corporates in the UK with ten holding more than 20 high street practices.

There is little published evidence so far of the effect of dental corporates on dentistry in England though previous work has indicated differences between associate populations.

The researchers used data from a survey of BDA members originally used from self-report questionnaires for the BDA to generate evidence for the Doctors and Dentists Review Board (DDRB) review process.

Participants were asked about demographics, perceived decision-making abilities, motivation, career progression, job satisfaction and morale.

The resulting data covered both the NHS and private sectors and data from

the 2016 and 2017 surveys were analysed for associates working in England exclusively in either a corporate or non-corporate environment.

Corporate respondents included those working at Bhandal, Centre for Dentistry, Genix, IDH, Bupa/Oasis, Perfect Smile, Portman, Southern Dental and Rodericks.

From the total 565 responses, the researchers found that in both 2016 and 2017, female associates were less likely to work in corporate practice than non-corporate practice while in 2017, associates in the non-corporate sector were significantly more likely to have a UK qualification than those in the corporate sector.

Associates in the corporate sector were significantly more likely to have a UDA target than their counterparts in the non-corporate sector, according to the 2016 data.

In 2017, the majority of associates in both sectors earned between £50,000 and £74,999, but profit for 2017 corporate associates was significantly higher than that of non-corporate associates.

When asked about their working environment, the majority of associates in both sectors, in 2016 and 2017, agreed that they got support from their colleagues though corporate associates were significantly less likely to agree. Agreement that their practice was well managed was significantly higher in those working in non-corporate practices in 2016 and 2017.

Overall, most associates in both sectors agreed that they were able to provide patient care to a standard they were satisfied with.

In terms of satisfaction and morale, corporate associates were significantly less likely to report high morale than their non-corporate counterparts and job satisfaction fell significantly between 2016 and 2017 in both sectors.

Opinions of professionals over decision making and autonomy also showed variation between the sectors.

Corporate associates were less likely to agree that they were involved in decision making that affected their work or that they had clinical freedom.

The authors said: 'Data indicates that some factors including UDA value are similar between corporate and non-corporate associates but there appears to be a clear divide for aspects such as job satisfaction, morale, job security, decision making and control.

'Non-corporate associates in our study reported a significantly greater level of autonomy and a greater ability to make workplace, and clinical, decisions than those in the corporate sector.

They concluded: 'The competitive corporate dental market is still young and a true picture cannot be seen until the market matures. While this study illustrates that there are differences between the sectors it is evident that further work is needed to build a more definite picture of corporate dentistry and the influence it has on the profession.'

1. E. O'Selmo. Associates and their working environment: a comparison of corporate and non-corporate associates. *Br Dent J* 2018; **225**: 425–430. <https://www.nature.com/articles/sj.bdj.2018.741>.