UK ranks low in dentist per capita

New Eurostat figures add to concerns over shortages after Brexit

By DTI

LONDON, UK: Despite some growth in the overall dental workforce within the last five years, the UK still has one of the lowest ratios of dentists per capita in Europe, only ahead of four other countries, latest figures released by Eurostat in Luxembourg indicate. Fewer dentists per 100,000 inhabitants were only found in the Netherlands, Slovakia, Malta and Poland, according to the EU statistical office.

The ratio of dentists per capita in the UK falls significantly short compared with Germany, Sweden and Portugal, which have almost 60 per cent more dentists per 100,000 people. Leading the list of the 28 EU member states with over 126 dentists per 100,000 in 2014 was Greece, followed by Bulgaria and Lithuania, which also saw the highest increase of all countries surveyed, with 21 more dentists compared with the number in 2009.

With almost 35,000 active dentists, the UK currently has the fourth-largest dental workforce in the EU after Italy, France and Germany.

The figures have been made available at a time when there is increased concern of shortages in UK dental care owing to the large number of EU professionals feared to leave the UK after the Brexit. In a statement released in February, Dr Steve Williams, the Clinical Services Director of mydentist, one of Britain’s largest dental chains, warned that the withdrawal of EU dental professionals from the UK would be devastating and could add to an already understaffed workforce, particularly in rural areas. Currently, almost one-fifth of dentists registered with the General Dental Council are from the EU.

“Dentistry is one of the areas of NHS care that is most heavily dependent on EU-trained professionals. It will be vital to ensure that Brexit does not undermine our ability to provide NHS dental care by inadvertently disrupting the supply of dentists in the UK,” Williams said.

Similar concerns have been expressed by other medical bodies, like the British Medical Association, which recently conducted a survey among EEA-trained dentists and found that four in ten are contemplating moving to another country after the UK split from Europe.

By invoking Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, the UK government has said it will officially start Brexit negotiations with the EU later this month. Prime Minister Theresa May announced earlier this year that the UK would not remain in the single market, which provides freedom of movement, regardless of the trade deal negotiated with Brussels.