News in brief

Free service

Dentists are to get a free, confidential service giving them support and advice on physical and mental health issues. The Practitioner Health Programme (PHP) which is also aimed at doctors, is initially being piloted in the London area. Dentists and doctors have high rates of mental health problems, especially addiction problems and depression. Doctors and dentists also find it difficult to ask for help and often their problem reaches crisis levels before they feel able to seek help.

This new service and the first of its kind, will help dentists and doctors, particularly where their condition may be affecting their ability to work. Judith Husband, vice chair of the British Dental Association (BDA), said, ‘It takes courage for health care workers suffering from an illness or an addiction to acknowledge that they have a problem in the first place, so taking the next step in accessing appropriate treatment can present real difficulties. We believe this dedicated, one-stop confidential service that has been designed specifically for health professionals, will make it much easier for dentists to get the support they need.’ If it is successful, the service may be extended to other areas across the country.

For more information, see www.php.nhs.uk

New member

The Chief Dental Officer, Barry Cockroft has been invited to join the new strategic group that will oversee all medical education and training in England – Medical Education England (MEE). The group was formed following recommendations by Sir John Tooke’s Inquiry into Modernising Medical Careers and Training in England – Medicine of the Future. The group will coordinate a major restructuring of postgraduate training for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals, and will also carry out national-level scrutiny of workforce planning and the commissioning of education and training by strategic health authorities.

More complaints

The Dental Complaints Service (DCS) logged 427 complaints in October and 158 complaints in November last year. For January – November 2008, the DCS logged 1,501 complaints, an increase of nine per cent over the same period in 2007. The average number of complaints logged since the DCS was launched in May 2006 is around 32 per week.

Three cheers for Dr Crouch

An orthodontist has won a landmark victory, after taking on the Department of Health and fighting against an appeal, which would have given health bosses the right to terminate dental contracts without cause or notice.

The DH lodged the appeal earlier this year after Eddie Crouch, an orthodontist in Birmingham, won a Judicial Review, which said that primary care trusts (PCTs) were wrong to insert a clause in the NHS dental contracts allowing them to terminate the contract without cause or notice.

The DH battled it out in the High Court, saying that health bosses needed such a power.

The Court of Appeal upheld the earlier ruling that the reasons by which a PCT can end a contract are set out in legislation and that a PCT must abide by legitimate termination reasons.

If the DH had won the appeal, primary care trusts would have had the power to end dentists’ contracts with as little as one day’s notice.

Dr Crouch said that it was ‘reassuring’ that ‘fairness was seen to be upheld’ and said it ‘should encourage others to challenge inappropriate powers that PCTs and the Department try to influence’.

Dr Crouch was forced to rely on financial support from fellow dentists to fight the case after he failed to come to an agreement with the British Dental Association (BDA) over a confidentiality document they wanted him to sign.

Mouthwash link with cancer

Mouthwashes containing alcohol can cause oral cancer and should be removed from supermarket shelves, a dental health study claims.

The news, which was revealed as Dental Tribune was going to press reports sufficient scientific evidence that such mouthwashes contribute to an increased risk of the disease.

The ethanol in mouthwash is thought to allow cancer-causing substances to permeate the lining of the mouth.

Michael McCullough, associate professor of oral medicine at the University of Melbourne, Australia, who led the study, said, ‘We see people with oral cancer who have no other risk factors than the use of mouthwash containing alcohol, so what we’ve done is review all the evidence.

‘Since this article, further evidence has come out, too. We believe there should be warnings. If it was a facial cream that had a four to fivefold increased risk of skin cancer, no-one would believe there should be warnings.’

Professor McCullough, chair of the Australian Dental Association’s therapeutics committee, said the alcohol in mouthwash ‘increases the permeability’ of the mucus membrane to other carcinogens, such as nicotine.

A toxic breakdown product of alcohol called acetaldehyde that may accumulate in the oral cavity...