**News & Opinions**

**Government launches ‘independent review’**

Dental bodies have welcomed an independent review of NHS dentistry launched by the government.

The review was set up following a damning report by the Health Select Committee which criticised the new dental contract. Health Secretary Alan Johnson, said: ‘I have appointed the independent review team to help us understand what more needs to be done to ensure that every person who wants to visit an NHS dentist can do so. The review team will also advise on how we can ensure that all NHS dental services meet the highest standards of care. We want to make sure that every patient’s needs are met and that dentists are carrying out the right level of preventative care.’

The independent review team will be chaired by Professor Jimmy Steele, chair in Oral Health Services Research at the School of Dental Sciences in Newcastle. The other members of the team are Eric Rooney, consultant in Dental Public Health, Cumbria Primary Care Trust (PCT), Janet Clarke, clinical director of Salford Dental Services, Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT and Tom Wilson, director of contracts, Milton Keynes PCT.

The results of the study, A Review of NHS Dentistry in England will be published in the spring.

The British Dental Association (BDA) called the independent review ‘a step forward in addressing the significant problems facing NHS dentists and patients’. BDA executive board chair Susie Sanderson said: ‘The BDA is pleased to see the long overdue announcement of a review of NHS dentistry in England.

One of the key aims of the review is to identify ways the government and local NHS can work together to increase access to NHS dentists and improve quality of services. The review team will examine why there are improvements in some parts of the country, while problems continue elsewhere.

It will also investigate whether the decline in complex treatments reflects the clinical needs of patients.

The announcement recognises the significant problems patients and dentists face, and places the Department of Health on a path to addressing those problems.

Iain Hathorn, chairman of the British Orthodontic Society (BOS) voiced his concern about what he calls a lack of orthodontic services around the UK and the low numbers of trained specialists.

He wants increased funding for treatments to be made available to patients, where necessary, and for more funding for academic appointments to support the increased numbers in undergraduate training.

Mr Hathorn said: ‘The BOS is also committed to help inform commissioners for primary and secondary care who were given such a poor report from the Health Select Committee. There is a high turnover of managers in dental commissioning, who need help to understand the complexities of dental and orthodontic contracts, to ensure the highest numbers of patients get the treatments they deserve.’

Chief executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter said: ‘The government must address the issues, and the independent review is a start.’

Official figures released by the NHS information centre in June showed that the number of people seeing an NHS dentist had fallen by a million after April 2006, when the reform package came in.

**BDA supports fluoridation plans**

The British Dental Association is backing a proposal by the South Central Strategic Health Authority to fluoridate the water in Southampton and parts of South West Hampshire.

The British Dental Association (BDA) claims it has drawn widely from available scientific evidence and believes that fluoridation of the water supply at the proposed one part per million is a safe and effective method of reducing dental decay in people of all ages and from all social backgrounds.

It also agrees with the World Health Organisation’s position that the level of dental caries falls from seven at a fluoride concentration of 0.1mg to around 3.5 at a fluoride concentration of 1.0mg (i.e. one part per million).

The BDA’s scientific adviser, Professor Damien Walmsey said: ‘The BDA bases its support for the proposed scheme on solid research. This has been carried out nationally and internationally.

On a local level we have looked at the impact of fluoridation on the dental health of people living in Birmingham. Five year-olds in Britain’s second largest city have half the rate of tooth decay as their peers in Southampton where it isn’t fluoridated.

I believe that if fluoridation was introduced in Southampton it could play a major role in helping to reduce the high rates of tooth decay there as it makes teeth more resistant to disease.’

This is the first consultation of its kind in England since a change in the law over the way fluoridation can be introduced. The three-month long consultation ended on 19 December. The responses will now be assessed and the 12 board members of South Central Strategic Health Authority will vote on the consultation outcome on February 26.