MPs knock independent review

MPS have criticised the independent review into NHS dentistry in England for failing to have a practising community dentist on its panel.

An independent team, to help improve access for patients who want to see a NHS dentist, was appointed in December by Health Secretary Alan Johnson.

The team led by Professor Jimmy Steele of Newcastle university is made up of Eric Bonney, consultant in Dental Public Health, Cumbria Primary Care Trust (PCT), Janet Clarke, clinical director of Salaried Dental Services, Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT and Tom Wilson, director of contracts, Milton Keynes PCT.

Mike Penning, shadow health minister, expressed his concerns during the debate over the ‘lack of engagement between ministers and the professionals’.

He also questioned why no health minister attended the British Dental Association’s (BDA) conference last year ‘to speak on behalf of the government, given that the contract is so controversial within the profession’.

The BDA event was attended by the Liberal Democrats spokesman, Mr Penning and the Chief Dental Officer, Barry Cockcroft.

Mr Penning and the Liberal Democrats spokesman refused to debate with Dr Cockcroft in public as ‘he is a civil servant—he is not a minister of the crown and he is not elected; he is appointed by the Secretary of State for Health—and it is fundamentally unfair that a civil servant is there to represent the mistakes and problems that the government have got themselves into on dentistry’.

Mr Penning added: ‘As the process goes on and as this contract is reviewed, I am very concerned about whether the government will have the courage to admit how much of the contract they have got wrong and how much of it has affected people in this country.’

Mr Penning would like to see the length of contracts extended so dentists can invest in their practices.

‘If we want dentists to come back into the NHS, or young dentists coming out of training schools—I have visited them and they are fantastic—to come into the NHS, we must give them the confidence to do so, especially in this difficult economic climate,’ he said.

The government has just published its further response to the conclusions and recommendations that were made in the critical Health Select Committee report last summer.

In the report, it accepted that ‘progress on improving access to dental services has been disappointing to date’ and set out the aims of the independent review.

‘If we want dentists to come back into the NHS we must give them the confidence to do so’

During a debate in the House of Commons, Sandra Gidley, Liberal Democrat health spokesperson, said: ‘The panel undertaking the review has been welcomed, but I note that it contains no community dentist and so some dentists will be wondering about its composition.’

She added: ‘It seems to be made up of a couple of academicians and somebody who apparently wants to be the chief dental officer one day and a failed commissioner who commissioned dental services without doing a needs assessment.

‘Does that augur well for the future,’ she asked.

Good Practice

A dental surgery in Burton in Staffordshire was given the Good Practice Award by the British Dental Association (BDA). Dentist Yogi Savania, who owns Alexandra Dental Care with George Savva, attended a presentation evening in London with practice manager Michelle Cadd to accept the award from the BDA’s president Gordon Watkins. Mr Savania said: ‘We have always tried to provide excellent dental care and it is rewarding to be acknowledged as such by our British Dental Association.’

The award recognises practices that are committed to working to the high quality standards set by the BDA.

Teeth worries

Nearly half of patients believe they could have been offered a better service by their dentist, according to a recent survey. The national survey carried out by RevalHealth.com, a specialist healthcare search engine, also found that three quarters of the population would like to change something about themselves. Consumers are most worried about their teeth with 45 per cent wanting some kind of work, closely followed by a third wanting to change something about their body and 17 per cent who want to change their face or correct their eyesight through laser eye surgery.

Alcohol abuse

A retired dentist who lay dead in his house for weeks before being found, accidentally drank himself to death, a coroner said. William Hunter Gray Dodds, a retired dentist in Portsmouth was discovered by police at his home surrounded by empty beer cans and rotten food. Portsmouth coroner’s court heard how Mr Gray Dodds, who suffered from alcoholism, had not been seen for several weeks before police found him dead. His body was in an advanced state of decomposition and police said the death was not suspicious. He was known to be a long term abuser of alcohol. Mr Gray Dodds had no known living family. He had divorced from his ex-wife, who now lives in South Africa, many years ago. An autopsy revealed Mr Gray Dodds had cirrhosis of the liver and had consumed a lot of alcohol before he died.

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