‘Unworkable and illogical’ proposals

The Dental Defence Union has criticised the General Dental Council’s consultation document on insurance indemnity proposals as ‘unworkable, illogical and with the potential to leave some dental professionals and patients in the lurch’.

The Dental Defence Union (DDU) fear that under the proposals published for consultation by the General Dental Council (GDC), there will still be a risk that patients will not be compensated.

The GDC’s consultation, Requirement for professional indemnity for GDC registrants, closes in March 2009. It proposes two lists of minimum essential requirements for all types of provider, including that of indemnity, one for providers of insurance and one for providers of discretionary indemnity.

Rupert Hoppenbrouwers, head of the DDU said: ‘The dual approach taken in the consultation document suggests that insurance and discretion are comparable and minimum requirements can be made for each type of indemnity. This is simply not the case. While we recognise this consultation is for discussion and will not necessarily reflect the direction the GDC will take, there is an inherent contradiction in seeking to establish indemnity requirements that can be complied with by insurers and discretionary indemnity providers when the latter cannot agree to anything that would fetter their discretion.’

The consultation recognises that there is an issue of “enforceability” with discretion. As a mutual, non-profit making organisation which provides insurance alongside discretionary benefits – a detail missing from the consultation - we agree. In common with other discretionary providers, we cannot agree to any minimum requirements governing our exercise of discretion, because the very nature of discretion means we cannot give any guarantees.’

Mr Hoppenbrouwers called the consultation document ‘fundamentally flawed’ and said: ‘If, in the interests of protecting patients, you set minimum requirements for one type of provider, to ensure that patients will always receive appropriate compensation you must make consistent requirements of other types of provider. The GDC knows that a discretionary provider cannot agree to requirements that are consistent with those for insurers because to do so would fetter their discretion and they may be considered as holding themselves out to be insurers, which would be illegal.’

The DDU expressed disappointment that the GDC has not attempted to bring dentistry into line with other healthcare providers such as opticians and chiropractors who have to have insurance and that it has not followed the example of regulators in most other EU countries where insurance is either compulsory or recommended.

‘For each dental professional to have a contract of insurance and the certainty that subsequent negligence claims within the policy will be paid is indisputably in the interests of patients and of dental professionals themselves,’ added Mr Hoppenbrouwers.

Suspended prison sentence

A dentist in Merseyside, has been given a suspended jail sentence, for claiming payment from the NHS for patients who didn’t exist.

Robert Nolan, who has run a practice in Liverpool, since 1990, made up patients so he could falsely claim money and also claimed payment from the NHS for patients who didn’t exist.

Nolan was convicted of 20 offences of obtaining money transfers by deception. Sixteen convictions related to fictitious patients with fake addresses while four related to overpayment for work.

The 56-week sentence was suspended for 18 months and Nolan was placed under supervision. Judge Morrow also ordered him to do 500 hours unpaid work in the community, pay £1,500 in costs and imposed a three-month curfew. Nolan will now appear in front of the General Dental Council conduct committee.

NHS dental fraud team manager Stephen McKenzie said: ‘Our thorough investigation showed that he was systematically defrauding the NHS. He claimed money for patients that did not exist and for work that was never undertaken on his registered patients. It is despicable that a person in his position, a position of trust in the community, should steal money from the NHS.

He added: ‘Fortunately it is only a small minority of health-care professionals that abuse the system aimed at delivering NHS care. We were able to provide a clear trail that convinced the jury of his guilt. Any other dentist who considers the NHS as an easy target for fraud rather than a public service would be wise to consider how he would feel in Nolan’s shoes today.’

‘Vomiting robot’ meets students

Dental students can now practise on dummy patients plus a ‘vomiting robot’ that can be programmed to throw up, have a fit or stop breathing – at a new £402,000 dental training centre in the north-east.

The Bourne House dental education and training centre, in Belmont, near Durham City, is only the second of its kind in the country.

Barry Cackcroft, Chief Dental Officer for England opened the centre, which contains a ‘phantom head room’ with realistic mannequins which give trainees the chance to practise their techniques in lifelike conditions.

There is also a vomit button programmed to throw up, have a fit or stop breathing.

Malcolm Smith, postgraduate dental dean at the Northern Deanery said: ‘Having access to the finest equipment, technology and facilities will give dentists and practice teams excellent facilities in which to maximise their skills to ensure we as a region continue to deliver the very best patient care. The centre will increase the opportunities available to all dental health professionals training in the north-east.’

The centre has been funded by the North East Strategic Health Authority.

Entrepreneur fronts keynote address

Award-winning entrepreneur, Charan Gill, who featured on the TV show The Secret Millionaire, will be speaking at this year’s British Dental Conference and Exhibitions.

Mr Gill, who sold his restaurant empire for £46m, will be giving the keynote address at the event which takes place in Glasgow, from 4-6 June. Author and paralympic gold-medallist Marc Woods will also be a guest speaker at the event.

The conference and exhibition Dentistry is transforming will bring together an extensive line-up of nearly 100 conference speakers who will explore the changing face of the profession today.

A range of exhibitors will showcase the changes in dental technology as the profession looks ahead to the challenges of the future.

International guest speakers at the event include Cherilyn Sheets, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, on aesthetic restorative practice; Nick Odpian, St. Radboud University Medical Centre, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, on the expanding use of posterior composites in clinical practice; and Mikael Zimmerman, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, on infection control.

There will also be sessions covering clinical and practical business skills for dental care professionals and a selection of seminars hosted by leading dental organisations.

Also, new at this year’s event will be 50-minute exhibition hall seminars entitling delegates to additional verifiable continuing professional development.

For further information or to register for Dentistry is transforming, the 2009 British Dental Conference and Exhibitions, visit www.bda.org/conference or telephone 0870 166 0625. Any other queries about the event can be emailed to events@bda.org or by phone on 020 7563 4590.