Positive review of HIV health staff ban

The Department of Health confirms review of ‘outdated’ HIV policy

The Department of Health has confirmed that the policy which currently prevents HIV-positive surgeons and dentists from working in the UK is being reviewed.

Under Department of Health rules, HIV-positive health workers working in surgery, dentistry and specialist nursing, plus obstetrics and gynaecology are not allowed to carry out invasive surgery or ‘exposure prone procedures’ that could risk blood contamination.

The announcement has been welcomed by campaigners and Aids charities, who say advances in HIV therapy drugs makes it easier for people to undertake such clinical roles.

British policy is stricter than in many European countries plus the US and Australia, where dentists with HIV can work.

According to reports, there have been no reported healthcare worker to patient HIV transmissions in the UK, and only four such cases recorded worldwide and furthermore, dentists with HIV are permitted to work in the US and Australia.

According to reports, a DH spokesperson said: ‘There is a very low risk of transmission of HIV from an infected healthcare worker to patient during certain exposure prone procedures, Department of Health guidance recommends that healthcare workers infected with HIV do not undertake these procedures.’

One dental professional said: ‘I think that this review hopefully leading to a change in stance by the DH, has been a long-time coming.

However the chance of an accidental injury with a contaminated instrument to a healthcare professional is very real. Dentists and healthcare professionals never differentiate between patients.’

‘I feel it is about time that the discrimination stops against us as well!’

Another dentist replied to this response saying: ‘Following the legislation associated with the CQC I cannot see why a HIV dental professional cannot work normally assuming they are under the care of a medical practitioner, suitable medication regime and an undetectable viral load.’

One angry dentist said: ‘I wouldn’t expect anything less of them. Action through the courts at named individuals would sort them out PDQ. About time the BDA actually took a stance as well and actively harassed the clowns who make the decisions.’

The guidance on the policy is currently being reviewed by the UK Advisory Panel for Healthcare Workers Infected with Bloodborne Viruses (UKAP), the Advisory Group on Hepatitis and the Expert Advisory Group on Aids.

The DH has reportedly said that the review is expected to be completed within the next few months, and that it would consider any recommendations received from the three advisory panels.

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