Private dentistry booms on

Annual profits in the private dental sector have risen by £6,000, while profits for NHS practices have dropped, according to new figures.

The figures from the National Association of Specialist Dental Accountants (NASDA), show that during 2007/08, annual profits for NHS practices fell from £149,000 to £148,000, while profits rose in the private sector from £151,000 to £157,000.

Costs have gone up and on average a private practice is now spending £259,000 on materials, laboratory bills, wages, direct costs, and overheads while NHS practices spend around £220,000, equivalent to 59 per cent and 65 per cent of practice fee income, respectively.

These figures represent the end of the second year of the NHS dental contract.

Once again, the NASDA statistics show a considerable variation in the rate of Unit of Dental Activity with £24.58 being the average for practices and £16.20 the lowest. The average UDA rate for associates is £21.58.

Ian Simpson, a partner in NASDA member Humphrey and Co, and responsible for the compilation of this year’s figures, said: ‘From what we are seeing, despite this small drop in profit, NHS practices are generally more profitable because they engage more associates. What we are also seeing are practices which are consolidating and operating more surgeries over longer hours or growing in size. This would appear to be the way that dentistry is going.’

NASDA also announced the results of its latest quarterly study of dental practice valuations and sale agreements.

Based on goodwill as a percentage of fee income, the figure for both valuations and sale agreements, for the quarter ending 51 January stood at 77 per cent. This compares with an average figure of 94 per cent for valuations and 85 per cent for deals for the quarter ending October 2008.

‘Appalling wait’ for Zach

A boy who is terrified of dentists, is being forced to wait 14 months, to have specialist dental treatment under sedation under the NHS.

The parents of eight-year-old Zach from Plymouth, said they are ‘dismayed’.

Father, Leroy Lander said: ‘I can’t believe they are prepared to leave children to wait that long to have dental treatment that’s needed. It’s appalling.’

Zach was referred for specialist dental treatment under sedation in September last year because he is terrified of dentists.

After hearing nothing for months, Mr Lander called the specialist and was told there was a 14-month waiting list for the treatment.

He said his son has a condition which means his teeth have thinner enamel than they should, which has contributed to him having seven cavities.

Zach is so terrified, he won’t open his mouth properly to let the dentist put his instruments in.

Patients with dental phobias are referred by their general dentist for some treatments, such as fillings or extractions, under sedation, commonly using nitrous oxide.

Alan Yardley, senior paediatric dentist and clinical director for NHS Plymouth dental services, has admitted that the waiting time for treatment under sedation is currently ‘much longer than we would want’ due to health and safety restrictions.

The nitrous oxide used for dental sedation can pose a hazard to clinical staff over an extended period of time, so staff exposure time needs to be limited. This means only three patients can be treated under sedation a day.

In 2006, an eight-year-old girl developed such a phobia of dentists that after having her teeth out under sedation, she refused to eat or drink and starved to death.