Unregulated indemnity continues

Thousands of dentists are thought to be working without full insurance cover or using schemes that have loopholes—leaving patients without any compensation when they receive botched treatment.

The Dental Defence Union, the specialist dental division of the Medical Defence Union, claims that many patients mistakenly assume their dentist or doctor is insured in the same way as their car or house, but this is not the case.

Under the current, outdated system of dental indemnity, dentists are still not required to have insurance.

The DDU would like the General Dental Council (GDC) to specify how dentists should be insured, though it has the power to make it compulsory for every dentist to be insured, because their regulators are required to make decisions on the ‘cogency of the arguments advanced’ and not simply on numbers of people and organisations for or against proposals.

Many patients, and even the dentist, are reliant on discretionary indemnity and the DDU is campaigning for the GDC to make it compulsory for every dentist to have a contract of insurance.

Regrettably, the obvious alternative is more NHS dentists not mass medication where there are contested benefits and ill-understood risks.

The decision by South Central Strategic Health Authority to fluoridate the water in Southampton, despite 72 per cent being opposed to the idea,

The British Dental Association (BDA) has also welcomed the decision which it claims has been supported by dentists in the region.

John Spottiswoode, chairman of Hampshire Against Fluoridation, called it ‘absolutely disgraceful’ and said: ‘They have re-

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n MP in Hampshire has made a last-ditch bid to stop the fluoridation of water in Southampton and Eastleigh going ahead by appealing to the Environment Agency to look at its impact on local water courses and rivers.

The decision, which will affect around 200,000 people, followed a large public consultation and months of debate.

Liberal Democrat MP, Chris Huhne is calling for a proper Environmental Impact Assessment of the decision made by the South Central Strategic Health Authority.

I have written to the chairman of the Environment Agency, Lord Chris Smith, to ask if it will investigate this matter and come to a clear view about the environmental risks of adding more than 100 tons a year of fluoride to local water supplies,’ he said.

Mr Huhne added: ‘Many local residents rightly do not want to take the health authority’s decision lying down, as it flies in the face of nearly three quarters of the responses to the consultation and all the local councils and MPs who expressed a view. It is frankly high-handed.

No-one doubts that teeth need better care, but the obvious alternative is more NHS dentists not mass medication where there are contested benefits and ill-understood risks.

The British Dental Association (BDA) has also welcomed the decision made by the South Central Strategic Health Authority (SCSHA) chief executive, on announcing the decision said: ‘We recognise that water fluoridation is a contentious issue for some people. The Board was satisfied that, based on existing research, water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to improve dental health.’

While Bob Deans, chief executive for Southampton City Primary Care Trust said: ‘Southampton City PCT continues to believe that a water fluoridation scheme, when introduced with continued oral health promotion, will be the most effective way of reducing the large numbers of tooth fillings and extractions currently needed by children in Southampton.’