NHS Dentistry in Crisis

After a year of the new contract, CHALLENGE has reported that NHS dentistry is perilously close to collapse, contrary to what Chief Dental Officer for England, Dr Barry Cockcroft would have people believe. CHALLENGE is a pressure group dedicated to returning NHS dentistry to some semblance of sanity and has carried out a survey of dentists to find out their views and to reveal the truth.

Almost all respondents did not agree with a series of statements made by the Chief Dental Officer for England, including:

- The new NHS contract frees up time for dentists to spend more time with their patients and reduce primary dental care.
- The dentists are paid the same amount under the new contract for 5 per cent less work.
- The average NHS dentist with a high NHS commitment can earn £60,000 per annum for 5 per cent less work.
- The new NHS system takes dentists off the treadmill.
- Patterns of treatment are changing for those who responded; most were providing fewer.
- Boot fillings
- Cohalt Chrome Dentures
- Multiple Crown Cases
- Bridge Cases.

CHALLENGE is a non-profit making organisation, membership is free to any dentist. Its website can be found at www.ChallengeDentist.com. It will be holding a ‘Challenger’s Dental Summit’ on June 7th in Birmingham, a major conference to investigate the legality of the new NHS contract and whether and how it could be open to challenge in court, and what further actions the profession wish to take in opposition.

A year on from the start of new NHS dentists’ contracts in England, research by Which? has revealed huge regional variations in the availability of NHS dental care, as well as a continuing lack of practitioners taking on new patients.

A total of 466 dentistry practices across all 10 strategic health authorities in England were contacted to find out what progress they had made in offering new patients. The research shows that just over a third of dental practices (36 per cent) are taking on any new NHS patients; no significant improvement since 2005 when the figure was 51 per cent. In some parts of the country, the figure is even lower.

People living in the north west of England are less likely than average to have access to NHS dentistry — just 15 per cent of dental practices are taking on any new NHS patients. Residents of York- shire and Humberside (15 per cent) and south central England (16 per cent) are also worse off than most. The areas shown to have the highest proportion of dental practices taking on NHS patients were the west midlands (19 per cent) and London (19 per cent).

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