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 re-wards patients.
- The dentists are paid the same amount under the new contract for 5 per cent less work.
- The average NHS dentist with a fairly high NHS commitment can earn £600,000 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 respond; most were providing fewer:
- Root fillings
- Cobalt-Chromium 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.ChallengeDent.com It will be holding a “Challenge Dental Summit” on 24 June in Birmingham, a major conference to investigate the legality of the new NHS contract and whether the change could be open to challenge in court, and what further actions the profession wish to take in position.

Other areas covered:-
- Eight years later less more half of British adults are not registered with a NHS dentist, according to the British Dental Association.
- The average NHS dentist with a fairly high NHS commitment can earn £600,000 per annum for 5 per cent less work.
- The new NHS system takes dentists off the treadmill.

Which? claims NHS dentistry is a postcode lottery

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 dental practices across all 10 strategic health authorities were surveyed in the first quarter of 2006-07. Which? say that PCTs did not award dentists an annual budget but an annual contract value – a sub-division that has left many surveys. ‘Service levels may be defined by an annual number of units of dental activity or they may include service outputs that cannot be measured through courses of treatment that makes sense to you. She went on PCTs, as the commissioning bodies, are responsible for monitoring the delivery of services by your local dental providers.

An Early Day Motion is an opportunity to test the water of opinion in the House of Commons by seeing how many MPs sign up to it. Graham Stuart MP has put down the following about orthodontics:

‘That this House notes with concern the geographical inequality in the provision of orthodontic care and the shortage of training places for orthodontic specialists; further notes that one fifth of orthodontic specialists are due to retire in the next six years; further notes that a shortage of specialists is driving patients to consult practitioners who have insufficient training and experience; further notes that there are only two orthodontic speciality training schemes in England and it is necessary to increase the number of funded training posts in UK dental schools.’

So far it has attracted 15 signatures.