NHS Dentistry in Crisis

A year on from the start of new NHS dentists’ contracts in England, researchers have revealed huge regional variations in the availability of NHS dentistry, as well as a continuing lack of practitioners taking on new patients.

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-warded 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 £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
- Cobalt Chrome Dentures
- Multiple Crown Cases
- Bridge Cases.

CHALLENGE found that:
- The new contracts were introduced to improve access to NHS dentistry but only 1 in 5 dentists is taking new NHS patients.
- Four out of five dentists have restricted access to NHS treatment in some way.
- 99.8 per cent of dentists say the new contract has done nothing to improve their working lives.

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 dentistry, as well as a continuing lack of practitioners taking on new patients.

A total of 466 dentistry practices across all 10 strategic health authorities submitted their experiences.

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.

Most practices who were taking all NHS patients could offer an appointment within a month, and 65 per cent could offer an appointment within two weeks. The situation was best in London, where 89 per cent of practises could offer an appointment within two weeks and 96 per cent within 4 weeks.

Almost two thirds of practices not taking on NHS patients offered advice on how to find an NHS dentist:
- 29% suggested calling NHS Direct
- 19% suggested another dentist
- 17% suggested calling the PCT.

But Health Minister Rosie Winterton said the old system had been ‘deeply flawed’ with ‘gaps in access’. She added: “Thanks to the reforms, PCTs now have the power and money to improve and develop local dental services, and are now turning the corner in improving access to dentistry.”