NHS events

Professor Jimmy Steele, chair of the independent review team for NHS Dentistry, is calling for dental professionals to give their views on NHS dentistry at five ‘engagement events’ being held around the country over the next two months. Professionals are invited to join NHS commissioners and patient representatives at any of the five engagement events being held in Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and London on April and May. Since its appointment in December 2008, the review team has been investigating why there are variations in access to dentistry in England and how the NHS can deliver continuous improvements in the quality of care. At these events, Professor Steele will discuss the emerging findings of the review with people involved in delivering and improving NHS dental services. Inviting them to contribute to the development of recommendations:

Professor Jimmy Steele, chair of the Independent Dentistry Review Team said: ‘I want to continue to listen to the views of dentists and their teams, patients and NHS staff and to take their advice on improving access, promoting prevention and ensuring NHS services, inviting them to contribute to the development of recommendations’.

The results of the study, ‘put these figures into context’ according to similarly skilled groups in the private sector.

Dentists look set to get a 0.21 per cent increase in earnings following a recommendation of the Review Body on Doctors’ and Dentists’ Pay.

Derek Watson

The Dental Practitioners Association, claims that as the Retail Prices Index is currently 5.2 per cent—anything less than this is effectively a pay cut.

Jim Donaldson, chairman of the Dental Practitioners Association (DPA) said: ‘The DDRB seems to assume no responsibility for difficulties in NHS access.

Year after year we have tried to explain to them that dentists are motivated to either join or leave the NHS based on comparison with similarly skilled groups and also the disparity in terms and conditions between the public and private sectors.

Pay is a vital element of the NHS package, yet year after year it is cut in real terms.

The new contract is sufficiently unattractive and uncertain without this further clear signal that financial penalties are to be imposed year after year by below-inflation awards.’

While Brian Levy, president of the DPA said ‘With the RPI at 3.2 per cent, this recommendation can only be viewed by NHS dentists and other pay cut. This will further reduce our members’ ability to accept and treat NHS patients.’

Derek Watson, chief executive officer of the DPA, claimed that the Review Body is ‘hopelessly confused about how to set wages to retain dentists in the NHS’.

He added: ‘Four years ago they used the doctors’ increase. Three years ago they used the Average Earnings Index. Then they used the Hospital and Community Health Services sector where dentists are salaried and have their expenses fully reimbursed. This year they have under-cut even that award. No wonder high street dentists are choosing to do less NHS work! The government has broken its promise to provide a comprehensive dental service to the nation in return for the high levels of tax and national insurance paid.’

The British Dental Association (BDA) echoed the DPA’s concerns.

The 0.21 per cent rise is based on a formula that, taking estimated decreased expenses into account, suggests GDPs will actually see a 1.5 per cent increase in net incomes.

However John Milne, chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee (GDPC), said: ‘Sadly, the basis of the formula which suggests that the increase amount to 1.5 per cent in real terms does not take account of the effect of the devaluation of sterling and its effect on the prices of equipment and materials that are largely manufactured overseas.

These expenses, and dentists’ ability to access the finance necessary to meet them, are both adversely affected by the recession.’

He added: ‘We appreciate that a measure of financial restraint is necessary in the current economic climate. Clearly, economic prudence is essential for everyone.’

However he added: ‘But it’s also important to remember that high street dentists are running businesses that provide vital healthcare to millions of people.

Those businesses must be properly funded so that they can invest in their premises and equipment to deliver the highest quality care to their patients.’

The problems many patients have faced accessing NHS dentistry in recent years have been well documented.

Mr Milne claimed that the ‘solution to those problems is to build confidence in the future of NHS dentistry by properly supporting our current NHS practitioners, and sending a positive signal to newly qualifying dentists about the future of NHS dentistry.’

He said: ‘This settlement will do neither of those things.’