Waging war on dental nurse wages

The majority of dental nurses are still earning less than £20,000 a year, according to BADN’s recent salary survey

A survey into the salaries of dental nurses in the UK, conducted by BADN at the end of 2009, shows that the majority of dental nurses are earning less than £20,000 a year.

The majority of dental nurses who participated in the survey had been working in dental nursing for more than 10 years (60 per cent), worked more than 55 hours a week (55 per cent), in general practice (63 per cent), and earned between £10,000 and £20,000 a year (62 per cent).

Dental nurse salaries are still calculated by the hour (55 per cent), rather than as an annual salary (52 per cent), and are paid monthly (94 per cent) into a bank account (87 per cent), although one per cent are still paid in cash. Nearly a fifth (17 per cent) have second jobs, and over a third (35 per cent) are the sole or primary earners in their household.

Other findings

• 71 per cent of registered dental nurses pay their own GDC registration fees
• 92 per cent of BADN members pay their own BADN membership fees
• 54 per cent of student dental nurses pay their own training costs
• 45 per cent of employers make no contribution towards CPD costs; only 15 per cent cover all costs associated with CPD
• 92 per cent of employers do not provide any additional benefits, such as health insurance, pensions, childcare vouchers
• 52 per cent of registered dental nurses do not have their own indemnity cover
• 18 per cent of registered dental nurses have no indemnity cover at all

“We were shocked, but not particularly surprised, at the results of the survey,” said BADN President Sue Bruckel. “What is particularly disturbing is that the majority of the respondents were full time, fairly senior, dental nurses with more than 10 years experience – and the salaries are still well below the median pay for full time employees in the UK of around £25,500, according to ASHE and less than half the median pay for full time ‘health professionals’ of around £53,500.

“We discovered that most part-time dental nurses, or those who are younger or in more junior posts, were reluctant to participate in the survey because their salaries were so low. Of course, had these dental nurses actually participated, the results would have been even more damning, and shown more fully the exploitation of a predominantly female workforce.

“Inadequate insurance

“What is particularly disturbing is the number of dental nurses working without adequate, or in some cases any, indemnity cover. BADN included indemnity cover in its Full Membership package so dental nurses wouldn’t have the hassle of having to research the subject themselves, and because economies of scale mean we can obtain cover at a very low premium. I appreciate that the membership fee initially seems a considerable sum of money, but when you consider that this includes £1m indemnity cover – as well as free verifiable CPD, legal advice and a journal, in addition to other benefits – or the cost of NOT having cover, it really is worth every penny.

“In the meantime, BADN will continue to lobby for a reduction in the GDC registration fee for dental nurses. BADN chief executive Pam Swain and I shall be meeting with the GDC’s new chairman Alison Lockyer and new chief executive Alison White to present them with full details of our survey and a firm request that the matter of dental nurse registration fees be put at the top of the GDC agenda.”

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