GDC to address FtP backlog

Additional funding agreed from reserves to help clear case backlog and ensure capacity for rise in Fitness to Practise investigations

T
he General Dental Council (GDC) has agreed an additional £5.3m of funding to its budget for 2010. The measure was agreed at its March Council meeting, it was also de-
ced at that time to make the in-
nformation public.

The GDC stated: “The GDC is financially stable, with circa £14m remaining in our reserves. The discussions at our last Coun-
cil meeting were not around our financial stability, but around our desire to address some issues in the regulatory process such as Fitness to Practise.”

The main reason for the ad-
ditional funding is a £3.7m defici-
city in the money needed to bring the backlog of Fitness to Practise (FTP) investigations up to date. There was a 40 per cent increase in cases in 2009.

Currently, there are more than 850 cases in the system, of which roughly 180 are more than 12 months old. The GDC received 1,457 new cases in 2009, which represented a rise of 40 per cent on 2008. Of these, 1,249 (87 per cent) went to assessment and 852 were referred to the In-
vestigating Committee (IC). The 852 IC referrals represent 68 per cent of cases assessed and 50 per cent of cases received. To deal with these, the IC met 25 times in 2009 and reached a substantive decision on 502 cases (some of those referred during 2009) will be considered in 2010. This already shows a backlog of al-
most 500 cases for the IC alone.

In addition, data which had been extracted in July 2009 showed 16 cases which were more than 24 months old and had not been listed for a hearing and 11 which were between 18 and 24 months old and had not been listed.

The GDC reported: “Since 2007 we’ve seen six per cent more of our complaints coming from dental professionals themselves as well as a significant growth in complaints from the public. But the increase in complaints isn’t just a trend within the GDC. Complain-
tes figures relating to all NHS services in England went up by over ten percent between 2007 and 2009. We also clearly have more registrants now (who can be com-
plained about). With more regist-
trants it is inevitable there will be more costs involved in taking ac-
ction and if things go wrong. This drives a significant part of our activity and our cost base and we have to build our capacity to deal with this significant increase in the volume of work in our core regulatory functions.

The level of delay has been a cause of concern, as stated in the proposal document. It is clear that we are not currently dealing with all cases in a timely man-
nier and that a new approach is needed. A significantly reduced throughout time for all but the most complex cases is desirable in terms of both patient protec-
tion and fairness to registrants who are practising under the shadow of an allegation.”

Chair of the Council of the GDC, Alison Lockyer, said: “We had a robust discussion at the last Council meeting about making this significant investment in im-
proving our regulatory processes. This will help us address some of the Fitness to Practise issues which our CHRE 2009 review is likely to flag up. Making the in-
vestment now will put us in a bet-
ter position to manage our cases more effectively. This is essential for those who are under investiga-
tion and to protect the reputa-
tion of all dental professionals.”