Dwindling patients access NHS dentistry

Fewer people are now seeing an NHS dentist than they were before the new dental contract was introduced in 2006, according to official figures.

More than 27 million people visited their dentist in England in the two-year period ending December 2008, representing 53.4 per cent of the population.

But the figure was 900,000 less than the number seeing dentists before the new dental contracts were introduced in April 2006.

Findings from the NHS Information Centre revealed that 27.5 million people saw a dentist in the two-year period ending in December 2008, a rise of 500,000 from the figure three months earlier in September 2008.

But the number of patients seen was still 3.1 per cent less than the figure in the two-year period ending 31 December 2008, a rise of 300,000 from the two-year period ending December 2008, representing 53.4 per cent of the population.

The report, NIS Dental Statistics for England: Quarter 3 shows that in England, NHS dentists saw 49 per cent (18.7 million) of the adult population in the two-year period ending 31 December 2008.

This represented a 1.1 per cent increase on the previous period ending in September 2008 but a 3.4 per cent decrease on the numbers of adults seeing a dentist in the two-year period before the introduction of the new dental contract.

The amount of children visiting dentists was also down by 200,000 (2.4 per cent) on the pre-contract figures.

John Milne, chair of the British Dental Association’s General Dental Practice Committee, praised the improvement in access during 2008 and said: ‘Although these figures mean that there are still many people who wish to access a dentist but cannot do so, the increased number of people who can is good news.’

He added however ‘as well as maintaining this improvement, it is also important that the Department of Health gets to grips with the problems facing dentists as they seek to provide care and work with them to embrace Lord Darzi’s vision and help them to deliver high quality care.

The conclusions of the current inquiry into dental services being led by Professor Jimmy Steele, which are expected in the summer, will need to be the subject of consultation with the profession and any reforms arising from them will need to be properly piloted before they are implemented.

Chief Dental Officer, Barry Cockcroft said his confidence that the NHS will continue to build upon this improvement and said: ‘Today’s data shows that over the last two quarters of 2008, the number of patients accessing an NHS dentist in a two year period increased by nearly 540,000’.

It also shows that NHS dentists are providing more services for patients, an increase of 800,000 (3.1 per cent) courses of treatment in 2008/09 from the same period last year.

We want to ensure that every person who wants to access an NHS dentist is able to do so and have invested a record £2 billion in dentistry and set up a national access programme to help the NHS deliver this. The tide is turning and we are now seeing access to NHS dentistry starting to increase.’

He added that in 2007/08 there were 655 more NHS dentists than the year before, and with 25 per cent more students each year since 2001, there will be more to come in the future.

Brighter smiles
Young patients of a dentist in Bradford will be taking part in a Brighter Smile Day as part of the British Dental Health Foundation’s (BDHF) annual National Smile Month. Dentist Roger Holdsworth and his team at Roger Holdsworth Dental Care have organised a day of activities to drive the health message home to their young patients.

There will be competitions for the cleanest teeth, a drawing competition, friendly dietary advice and an educational DVD. Experienced dental staff will be on hand to offer advice. The BDHF campaign aims to increase public awareness of the benefits of good oral healthcare and runs from May 17 to June 16. This year’s campaign message is Look After Yourself, Bradford Health!

Psychiatric assessment
A dentist in Northern Ireland accused of murdering his wife and his ex-lover’s husband years ago is to be assessed by a psychiatrist. The expert will decide whether Colin McCole will face further questioning by police. Mr Howell had been due in court but his appearance was cancelled after he was admitted to hospital at Maghaberry prison. He is said to be suffering from severe stress and depression, and to be under close medical supervision.

At the time of their deaths in May 1991, it was thought Mrs Leanne Howell and Constable Trevor Buchanan had died in an apparent suicide pact. Mr Howell, who has been in custody since January, is also charged with drugging and indecently assaulting women.

Tribunal adjourned
The General Dental Council has adjourned a tribunal looking into allegations that a dentist refused to treat a number of Muslim women unless they wore headscarves. Omer Butt, put up signs at the Unsworth Smile Clinic in Parr Lane, Bury requesting Muslim women cover their hair. Last week, a General Dental Council disciplinary committee in London heard complaints from two people who said Butt refused to treat some of their relatives unless they wore headscarves. Butt faces a charge of misconduct for his treatment of two patients. If he is found guilty, he faces a charge of misconduct for his treatment of two patients. If he is found guilty, he faces a charge of misconduct for his treatment of two patients.

Chairman Gill Brown adjourned the tribunal until July 1.

www.dental-tribune.co.uk