Rise in number of clinical academics in dental schools

There has been a rise in the number of clinical academics in British dental schools, according to the Dental Schools Council.

The data published by the Council revealed a two per cent increase during the 2008-09 academic year.

This takes the total to 478 Full Time Equivalents (FTE), the highest number since 2000.

The Council especially welcomed the 12 per cent (15 FTE) increase in the number of lecturers between 2008 and 2009, and the evidence that younger clinical academics are being drawn from a more diverse population in terms of gender, age and ethnicity.

On the downside, there has been a 21 per cent decline (101 FTE) in the number of research-active clinical academics - professors, senior lecturers and lecturers - in the same time period.

Women continue to be underrepresented at senior clinical academic grades, with just 10 of the 17 dental schools employing a female professor.

Fifty-five per cent of clinical academics are aged over 46, compared with 51 per cent in 2004.

The Dental Schools Council is concerned that the recent increase in lecturers alone may be insufficient to replace the expertise and leadership in clinical academia lost through retirement.

It also claims that the small staffing levels in many dental specialties renders them especially vulnerable to change.

Prof William P Saunders, chair of the Dental Schools Council, said: “Dentistry is unique amongst the health professions, with funding from both Higher Education Funding Councils and the NHS, and teaching of dental students as a primary role of Higher Education Institutions.

“Clinical academic dentistry is one of the most stimulating and rewarding careers involving patient care, education and innovative research.”

He added: “We are delighted by the recent increase in staffing levels in UK dental schools.

“However, we do anticipate the added pressures to the public purse over the coming years, and, as a community of dental schools, we look forward to protect and support the quality of teaching and research, as well as the contributions of clinical academics to the NHS and of clinicians to academia.”

This is the eighth data update to be published by the Dental Schools Council since 2000.

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Dentist wins fight for PCT payment

A Merseyside dentist is to receive more than £500,000 following his victory in court against his PCT.

David Tomkins, a dental practitioner from Prescot House Dental Practice in Prescot, Merseyside, took Knowsley Primary Care Trust to the High Court for non-payment of money earned under his NHS contract since April 2006.

In the third such case to be taken to the High Court, the claim centred on two aspects; one was over the earnings value of a new associate who started in the base-line period for the new contract in 2005, the other was over an additional contract given to the practice following closure of a nearby practice with a NHS contract.

In his Judgement, Mr Justice Hickinbottom, who presided over the case, stated: “On the evidence - which, in substance, was uncontested - on 28 March 2006, the Trust and Mr Tomkins came to a legally binding and effective agreement, agreeing all terms except those that were dependent upon the outcome of Mr Zerin’s satirical earnings for the baseline period used in the calculation of the annual contract value under the transitional provisions I have described. They agreed a mechanism for determining that issue, ultimately by reference to the Appeal Unit. That reference was duly made, and the issue determined. That determination was binding upon the Trust. Of course, one has sympathy with a public body such as the Trust, who are required to work within tight financial constraints. However, despite the best efforts of their legal team, the Trust has been unable to persuade me that it has any ground for failing to comply with its contractual obligations to Mr Tomkins. It agreed to pay him £100,000 additional contractual value in respect of the Cross Lane Practice work. That was a contractual term agreed between them. In failing to pay him, the Trust is in breach of contract.”

Commenting on the result, David said: “I am very pleased with the verdict. It is what was expected since the trial ended. The Campaign for justice has followed a long and sometimes tortuous path with many stops along the way. It has had a negative effect on my health and there have been several dark moments but my resolve was never diminished. I never doubted that I would triumph in my victory as the damages are only the fees that should have been paid under the terms of the NHS contract.

“IT is also a victory for common sense and justice. The way that the PCT abused its executive power has been patently evident to all for see. They refused all requests to make good the contract and the decision makers refused to see me in person. Due to their intransigent attitude the dispute inevitably drifted to court. Their ignorance of the NHS and the PCT’s legal team, the Trust has been determined. That determination was made by reference to the Appeal Unit. That reference was duly made, and the issue determined. That determination was binding upon the Trust. Of course, one has sympathy with a public body such as the Trust, who are required to work within tight financial constraints. However, despite the best efforts of their legal team, the Trust has been unable to persuade me that it has any ground for failing to comply with its contractual obligations to Mr Tomkins. It agreed to pay him £100,000 additional contractual value in respect of the Cross Lane Practice work. That was a contractual term agreed between them. In failing to pay him, the Trust is in breach of contract.”

He added: “Finally to my wife Gillian whose impalacable support throughout the campaign has been crucial both financially and emotionally. It was her moral compass that guided me during times of doubt and pressure through to eventual justice and the landmark victory.

“I hope that other dentists who have had arbitrarily unfair treatment under the 2006 contract will be empowered by this verdict to seek legal advice and receive the justice they deserve.”

A spokesperson for the PCT commented: “NHS Knowsley followed the regulations and guidance during the negotiation of the new General Dental Services Contracts and felt this had been performed in an appropriate manner. Having discussed this with Mr Tomkins the Trust tried via mediation to negotiate a settlement. Unfortunately this case, after much delay, had to be determined by a judge in the High Court. NHS Knowsley is satisfied it acted in good faith and will abide by the judgment of the Court.”

The full judgement of the case can be read at http://www. baillie.org.uk/ewc/cases/EWHC/ QB/2010/1194.html.

For the last ten years, the dental training and resources provider has continued to help dental professionals meet their CPD obligations, providing courses that are flexible, involving and inspiring.

At the event, Smi-leone representatives talked to delegates interested in the MSc in Restorative and Aesthetic Dentistry, run in conjunction with the University of Manchester, CORE CPD - the latest learning platform that looks after all your core subject needs and DNNET II, which is designed to help dental nurses studying for the National Certificate or the NVQ level 5 in Oral Health Care Dental Nursing, but also services as a great refresher course for more experienced nurses.

A spokeswoman said: “The company’s key values of partnership, innovation, creativity and potential have helped evolve
Editorial comment
Something to smile about?

Well, anyone who reads my missives at all will know how rubbish I am at predicting things! Last time I confidently predicted that Paul Burstow would be the minister responsible for dentistry, and no sooner had the ink dried on the pages, then Earl Howe was named minister! Of course, there had had to be a modification to this responsibility, with Ann Milton being tasked with fluoridation issues. DT hopes to speak to Earl Howe soon and find out his views on the issues facing dentistry, so watch this space.

As I write this, dentists up and down the country will be digesting the article in this morning’s Times, claiming that a rising number of dentists in the UK are more interested in extraction and artificial restoration than using techniques such as endodontics to save natural dentition. Shame on that reporter, I hear you cry, but the claims are being made by fellow clinician and endodontist Dr Julian Webber. According to the article, Dr Webber states that “Good old-fashioned dentistry standards seem to be disappearing, with some dentists removing teeth that could be root treated and rebuilt. Preserving a tooth is technical and demanding. The alternatives, such as putting in an implant, can also be tricky, but some dentists prefer them because they are more lucrative.”

If you get the chance, read the article (http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article7141227.ece) and let me know your thoughts on it.

Business benefits

Thousands of dental businesses could benefit from many of the measures in the coalition agreement between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, according to the Forum of Private Business.

The Forum believes moves to cut red tape, impose ‘sunset clauses’ on regulations and review employment law will all be welcomed by small to medium-sized dental enterprises (SMEs).

Forum head of policy, Matthew Goodman said: “I’m sure this document will come as a breath of fresh air to many small business owners. In many ways, it reads like a ‘wish list’ of things the Forum has been demanding for several years.

We’ve also encouraged by the coalition’s pledge to evaluate the fairness of employment legislation, and its impact on Britain’s competitiveness. Many small business owners believe employment law is grossly skewed in favour of the employee – the need for a more fair and balanced approach is something the Forum has repeatedly highlighted.”

However, he added, “The challenge now is for the Government to translate these intentions into real, practical changes to the business environment, without simply creating more state bureaucracy and unnecessary compliance costs at a time when many small businesses are still struggling.”

The World’s First Online
MSc in Restorative & Aesthetic Dentistry

Master of Science in Restorative & Aesthetic Dentistry

‘The Best of Everything’

Two of the UK’s most respected education and academic organisations have joined forces to provide an innovative, technology driven MSc in Restorative and Aesthetic Dentistry. Smile-on, the UK’s pre-eminent healthcare education provider and the University of Manchester, one of the top twenty-five universities in the world, have had the prescience to collaborate in providing students with the best of everything – lecturers, online technology, live sessions and support.

Convenience
The majority of the learning resources on this programme will be online. The masters will combine interactive distance learning, webinars, live learning and print.

Ownership
The programme is designed to encourage the student to take responsibility for his/her own learning. The emphasis is on a self-directed learning approach.

Community
Students will be able to communicate with a diverse multi-ethnic global community of peers, with who they will also share residential get-togethers in fantastic settings around the world.

Opportunity
This innovative programme establishes the academic and clinical parameters and standards for restorative and aesthetic dentistry. Students will leave with a world-recognised MSc.

Call Smile-on to find out more:
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New strategy is required for dental research

A research summit for oral and dental researchers has called for changes in the way dental research is carried out.

Delegates from institutions across the United Kingdom highlighted a number of steps that must be taken to build on current successes, including closer collaboration with other researchers such as chemists and materials scientists, better engagement with funding bodies and the public, and refocusing research activity on quality rather than quantity.

The research summit, which was organised by Prof Paul Speight, president of the British Society for Oral and Dental Research (BSODR), was held at Sheffield University.

It attracted 60 leading figures from dental research across the United Kingdom including representatives of every United Kingdom dental school, the Faculty of General Dental Practice, the Cochrane Oral Health Group and the Department of Health.

The speakers were Prof Stephen Holgate from the Medical Research Council, Prof David Williams, president of the International Association of Dental Research, Prof Mike Curtis, immediate past president of BSODR, and Prof Jimmy Steele from Newcastle University.

The event was sponsored by the British Dental Association (BDA), BSODR and the National Institute for Health Research.

A full strategy with detailed proposals for next steps will now be developed by the BSODR.

GDC seeking Fitness to Practise panel members

The General Dental Council (GDC) is looking for fifty new Fitness to Practise panel members.

The GDC is hoping to attract applications from dentists, dental care professionals and lay people.

Fitness to Practise panel members play a vital role in the GDC's work to protect patients.

The GDC has the power to take action by either removing or restricting a dental professional's role for them. All applicants about whether this is the right role for them. All applicants will be considered on their individual skills and experience.

We especially hope to hear from dental care professionals who traditionally have been less likely to apply for this kind of role with the GDC.

The Fitness to Practise Committee is currently made up of 75 panel members: 38 dentists, 22 lay people and 15 Dental Care Professionals (DCPs). It is a part-time role, with members sitting for around 20 days a year. They are paid £355 a day and are reimbursed their expenses.

Interest can be registered by emailing: secretary@gdc-uk.org. Information will also be published on www.gdc-uk.org once the recruitment period officially opens in June.

Celebrities with dental phobia

Ty presenter Kelly Osbourne has revealed her dental phobia on her Twitter page.

The daughter of Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne tweeted: "I have to go get my filling today and the fear is really really kicking in. I need to get over this fear of the dentist but I can't!"

Kelly is not alone in her phobia, as other celebrities such as Robert De Niro are known to be frightened of the dentist chair.

A recent survey conducted by the British Dental Health Foundation discovered that one in four people do not visit a dentist due to dental phobia.

Chief Executive of the Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter, said: "Dentists recognise that many patients have this phobia, and therefore try to cater to that person's needs. Our aim is to make regular dental check-ups an acceptable part of everyday life for everyone."

Tooth Fairy boosts oral health message

In case you haven't heard, the Tooth Fairy has had a Hollywood makeover! Denplan is delighted to be a promotional partner of the latest children's blockbuster starring Dwayne Johnson (formerly known as The Rock) and Julie Andrews. The movie launched in cinemas on 28 May and you can see a preview at www.toothfairymovie.co.uk

“We’ve also teamed up with Philips and Colgate to create free and valuable dental kits as reader offers that will appear in selected regional press nationwide. The aim is to raise awareness of good oral healthcare, as well as creating opportunities for practice teams to promote their products and services by driving patients directly into their practices,” added Sarah.

At a regional level, this consumer campaign also provides Denplan members with an exclusive opportunity to promote their practices and their Tooth Fairy events in the local press. The media love an excuse to feature Hollywood news and celebrity imagery, making any release relating to the movie extremely appealing.

“To ensure our member dentists and their teams get the most from this campaign, we've prepared a host of themed materials exclusively for Denplan members. These include our Tooth Fairy Movie PR Toolkit, complete with dual branded posters, stickers and activity sheets plus sample press releases. By participating, our members can highlight to patients the added value of being associated with their practice as well as educating younger patients and their parents on the benefits of looking after their teeth.”

The Art of Dentistry is about to change...