GDC issues swine flu advice

The General Dental Council has issued advice to dental professionals, after the World Health Organisation declared a global flu pandemic following an emergency meeting.

The UK’s Health Departments have also issued detailed advice and guidelines.

Access research

Nine out of 10 people who tried to see a NHS dentist in the last two years were successful, according to the consumer organisation Which?

Margaret Chan said: ‘We have evidence to suggest we are seeing the first pandemic of the 21st century. However, she added: ‘Moving towards pandemic phase six does not imply we will see increased deaths or serious cases.’

A pandemic is declared on geographical terms as the virus spreads.

The swine flu (H1N1) virus first emerged in Mexico in April and has since spread to 74 countries.

Official reports say there have been nearly 50,000 cases globally and 141 deaths, with figures rising daily.

There have been more than 1,500 cases in the UK and Britain recently saw its first death from the virus, a 58-year-old mother who had given birth prematurely, died in Glasgow. She was said to have underlying health problems.

The British Dental Association (BDA) claims the research which shows three million people could not get an appointment with an NHS dentist in the past two years. Of these, 88 per cent were successful.

The BDA has issued advice to dental professionals, after the World Health Organisation declared a global flu pandemic following an emergency meeting.

As a healthcare professional, you should act ethically in this difficult situation. BDA guidance emphasises your professional duty to put patients’ interests first, considering the impact of your actions on patients, colleagues and the community.

If you are asked to do something which is outside your normal area of practice, you need to be sure that you are competent to do it and check that you are covered by indemnity.

However, it also warned: ‘As health professionals, you should not let your own state of health put patients at risk. If you become unwell you should follow appropriate advice including any local measures which may be in place.’

The Department of Health (DH) has also issued its own guidance and has advised dental professionals that all patients should be screened for symptoms of flu before attending, the practice by telephone and again on arrival at the practice.

Treatment of infected patients should be limited to pain relief and avoid aerosol-generating procedures where possible and infected patients should be segregated from well patients.

The DH also warns that in England and Wales, dentists may fail to deliver their contracted number of units of Dental Activity.

The guidance recommends that contractual payments continue with no penalties if providers have done everything within their powers to comply.

New appointment

The British Dental Association has welcomed the appointment of Andy Burnham as the Secretary of State for Health. Mr Burnham replaces Alan Johnson, who has accepted the role of Home Secretary.

John Milne, chair of the British Dental Association’s (BDA’s) General Dental Practice Committee said: ‘The BDA offers its congratulations to Mr Burnham on his appointment and looks forward to working with him and his team.’

Professor Jimmy Steele’s review of Dentistry, which has just been published, provides an opportunity for real improvements in dentistry. We look forward to considering its proposals and looking at how the delivery of NHS dentistry can be improved for patients and practitioners.

Dental honours

The British Dental Association’s director of policy and professional services, Linda Wallace, has been awarded an MBE and Eric Stanley Nash, formerly postgraduate dean at University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, has been awarded an OBE. Both awards were for services to healthcare and practitioners.

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The Government has been stockpiling antivirals such as Tamiflu and has ordered vaccine, some doses of which could be available by October.

There is some concern that the virus may mutate and become more virulent during the colder months of winter.

In a statement, the General Dental Council (GDC) said: ‘You may be asked to provide treatment at specialist centres, to continue providing treatment to non-symptomatic patients in your practice and/or to take part in other forms of healthcare delivery.

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Treatment of infected patients should be limited to pain relief and avoid aerosol-generating procedures where possible and infected patients should be segregated from well patients.

Where infected and well patients attend the same practice, a separation by time and/or space is essential.

Good general hygiene measures are of prime importance in containing the infection.

The DH recommends that an adequate supply of tissues, waste bins and hand-cleaning facilities is readily available.

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