News in brief

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

Dental honours
The British Dental Association's director of policy and professional services, Linda Wallasey, has been awarded an MBE, and Eric Stanley Nash, formerly director of policy and communications, has been awarded an OBE. Both awards were for services to healthcare and were announced in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Access research
Nine out of 10 people who tried to see an NHS dentist in the last year say that their face problems attempting to access NHS dentists are as bad as their teeth, but it's not nearly as difficult to find one as most people think.

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.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) director general, Dr Margaret Chan said: 'We have evidence to suggest we are seeing the first pandemic of the 21st century. However, she added: 'Moving to 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 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.

As a healthcare professional, you should act ethically in this difficult situation. GDC guidance emphasises your professional duty to put patients' interests first, taking account of your health and safety commitments to your teams.

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 should avoid aerosol-generating procedures where possible and infected patients should be segregated from well patients.

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

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

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.

More emergencies?
The number of people seeking emergency NHS dental treatment has risen in the last year, but ‘these figures should be put into perspective’, says Health Minister Anna Soubry.

Future planning
If you want to attract new patients to your practice or let your business achievements be known, you really need to implement a public relations plan.

Retirement funds
Now is the perfect time to consider your financial options if you want to reap the benefits from your pension fund in the five years from now.

Hard graft
As the bone-augmentation debate continues, Ali Abdellatif highlights the arguments for and against grafting, and looks at some of the different types of grafting systems.

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