Postcode lottery

Scotland has seen a rise in the number of NHS dental patients, but they are still very much at the mercy of a postcode lottery.

The percentage of patients registered with an NHS dentist ranges from 44.5 per cent in Grampian to 78 per cent in Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Throughout Scotland, the number of registrations has increased. By the end of March more than 5.5m people in Scotland had an NHS dentist, up from 2.9m a year ago.

Health boards are also making improvements with the number of children on the books of NHS dentists. However six health boards have still to meet a national target to register 80 per cent of three to five-year-olds by 2010-11.

Below the target were Western Isles (51.4 per cent), Orkney (60.1 per cent), Shetland (68.4 per cent), Grampian (69 per cent), Fife (75.6 per cent) and Highland (78.9 per cent).

This compares to 94.2 per cent registered in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Dr Richard Simpson MSP, Labour health spokesman, said the figures showed that an action plan set out by the previous Scottish Executive to increase the intake of dental students and improve NHS access was beginning to have an effect.

He said: ‘Things are improving. But the health boards that are far below the targets need to look at the situation very carefully and try to improve it.’

Liberal Democrat health spokesman Ross Finnie said it showed the ‘embedded inequalities’ in NHS dental provision throughout the country.

He said: ‘This postcode lottery must be addressed. The Scottish government must work harder to ensure that the increase in registration with NHS dentists benefits the whole country.’

Public Health Minister Shona Robison said: ‘I am pleased that there have been further increases in both child and adult dental registrations in the last quarter, which indicate that the measures we have taken to improve access are working.

While I recognise one of the factors behind this increase will be the extension of the registration period, there are other factors, such as the record number of dentists in Scotland offering NHS services.

Having said that, we know there are still problems with access to an NHS dentist in certain parts of Scotland and we are continuing to tackle this.’

Forced resignation

A dentist who had a nine-year affair with his dental nurse, forced her to resign from the practice when his wife found out, an employment tribunal was told.

Tariq Drabu, 44, was said to have lavished gifts, including a diamond ring, on Paula Jackson and rented a flat.

The 45-year-old was then forced to resign from the practice in Middleton, Manchester, when his wife Suraya found out.

She said Dr Drabu had offered her £100,000 if she left the practice and dumped her husband.

Mrs Jackson claimed that Dr Drabu had told her she could have anything she wanted and eventually he would leave his wife.

Mrs Jackson, who had started at the practice as a trainee dental nurse, had during the nine-year affair, become practice manager at Langley Dental Group.

She claimed she was ‘bullied’ into quitting her job and sued for constructive dismissal, which Mr Drabu admitted.

The amount of compensation will be fixed later.

Dr Drabu has been suspended by the General Dental Council from working for four months.

It found his conduct was unprofessional, inappropriate and not in the best interests of patients.

Agency death

A dental insurance company is searching for the family of a dentist in Cheshire who died in the arms of a call girl.

An insurance policy held by David Hillary, from Alderley Edge, has produced a payout of about £5,000 for his next of kin. However Dentists’ Provident have been unable to find any of his relatives - and the lump sum remains unpaid.

Mr Hillary, 55, lived with his father, Jack, at a dental surgery in Trafford Road, where he had practised for nearly 20 years.

His father died from lung cancer just 10 days before Mr Hillary was found dead.

An inquest into the dentist’s death found he had been out drinking with a friend before calling the Select escort agency in Sale.

He then drank more alcohol and took morphine with the escort until they fell asleep together on his sofa.

When the escort awoke in the early hours of the next morning, she could not wake him up. Cheshire coroner Nicholas Rheinberg said that Mr Hillary died from a combination of ‘alcohol and opiates toxicity’ - the combined levels of alcohol and drugs in his blood. He recorded a verdict of accidental death.

Anyone who can help trace Mr Hillary’s next of kin is asked to call Dentists’ Provident on 020 7222 2511.

Charity fundraiser

Staff at a dentist’s surgery in Wigan returned to the 1970s and donned afro wigs, platform boots and flowery shirts to raise the money for the health charity Dentaid.

Dentists, dental nurses and a hygienist at Pemberton Dental Practice in Pemberton, raised more than £250 for the charity, which provides much needed dental and oral health care in the developing world.

Dr Phil Racey, from Pemberton Dental Practice, said: ‘It was a great day. All the staff and patients had a wonderful time. The patients loved it too.’

Amalgam U-turn

The American drugs watchdog, the Food and Drug Administration has reversed its decision to warn against pregnant women and children having mercury fillings.

It followed a review that following a review of around 200 scientific studies the levels released by dental amalgam fillings are ‘not high enough to cause harm in patients’. 