Dentists still ‘poor relation’ to GPs

The average income for a dentist in England and Wales is just over £89,000, according to recent figures from the NHS Information Centre. This is still considerably below the £107,000 that the average GP earns. However the figures revealed that for some dentists, earnings can be much higher with one in 20 dentists earning more than £200,000 between 2007 and 2008 and nearly 400 earning more than £700,000.

The NHS Information Centre statistics revealed that 582 dentists - nearly two per cent of the total - earned more than £500,000 in that year.

The figures cover earnings in the second year of dentists working under the new NHS contract introduced in 2006. The earnings cover both their NHS and private work.

“Many practitioners were contending with the uncertainty of potential clawback of their contract values, Dentists, almost uniquely in the NHS, carry the business risk of their surgeries and are responsible for providing premises, equipment and staff.”

“the picture the statistics paint is one of earnings settling and the expenses of NHS practitioners rising slightly.”

He added: “What’s important now is that we look forward to what we hope will be a better future for NHS dentistry in which the reforms recommended by Professor Steer’s report are properly consulted on, meaningfully piloted and implemented for the good of patients and dentists alike.”

Health Minister Ann Keen claimed the report confirmed “that NHS dentists have good levels of earnings”.

She said: “Access to NHS dentistry is continuing to improve, following record investment, an expanding workforce and a continuing increase in the amount of services being bought by the NHS.”

One of the reasons it is thought that dentists are seeing their earnings grow is that they are taking on more private work and diversifying into cosmetic dentistry. This is a growth industry with the number of people seeking cosmetic treatments for their teeth increasing up to 40 per cent per year, according to the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (BACD).

The richest dentist in Britain is thought to be James Hull, who opened his first surgery in 1987 in Newport, Wales and now has 48 dental practices in the UK, most of which specialise in cosmetic dentistry. The chain has become a leader in cosmetic dentistry, which includes teeth whitening, veneers and implants. It has also expanded into orthoptics, chiropody and Botox treatments.

Earlier this year, the dental chain was valued at £250m, when it looked at selling a 50 per cent stake in the business to a private equity firm, in order to expand into continental Europe and the Middle East.

The Sunday Times Rich List claims Dr Hull is personally worth about £54m and said he has a 10m collection of vintage Jaguars.

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