Government to decide dentists’ pay and contract values

The coalition government will be making all decisions on NHS dental pay and contract values for the next two financial years, after it told the dental pay body it is no longer needed.

The government has told the chairman of the Doctors’ and Dentists’ Review Body (DDRB), that it will play no role in determining the remuneration of independent contractor general dental practitioners (GDPs) and general medical practitioners (GMPs) in England for the financial years 2011-12 and 2012-13.

In a letter, Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, said: I have decided that, based on our financial and economic position and the continued need for reduction in public sector expenditure, it will not be necessary for the DDRB to make any recommendations on the need for any earnings or contract uplifts for independent contractor GDPs and GMPs in England.

The government will make the decisions on any gross uplift, based on the efficiency assumption that we wish to apply and the evidence on non-staff expenses. It has therefore concluded that there is no requirement to ask DDRB to play a role in the remuneration of independent contractor GMPs and GDPs for financial years 2011/12 or 2012/13. We believe we have everything necessary from your past recommendations on the formulas to take forward discussions with relevant professional bodies. We remain determined to secure continued efficiencies from the investment in independent contractor GDPs and GDPs and therefore will reach our decisions based on the progress we can make in those negotiations.

The letter was sent to the chairman of the Review Body, Ron Amy, Susie Sanderson, chair of the BDA Executive Board said: Dentists are aware of the financial pressures behind the already-announced pay freeze for NHS workers earning more than £21,000 a year that have led the government to instruct DDRB not to make recommendations about earnings for GDPs for the next two financial years.

“GDPs are facing soaring expenses and the impact of those on contract values must be properly considered. The BDA will be supplying evidence on this to government that will underline the very real challenges dental practices face. It is important to note that the government’s intention to apply efficiency assumptions to its calculations of contract values amounts to a pay cut and isn’t helpful.”

Derek Watson, chief executive of the Dental Practitioners Association, also expressed his concern: “It was announced in the budget that the government has imposed a two-year pay freeze for public sector employees earning over £21,000 a year which would have included most dentists. This would have left the Review Body open to make an uplift recommendation based on expenses. The government has now closed this door by saying that it will also estimate expenses.”

The government will now need to negotiate directly with professional dental associations such as the BDA on how contract values should be raised to reflect the increase in expenses.

In Scotland, after intervention by the BDA, the government has reconsidered the way it is implementing this year’s DDRB pay award. The BDA’s Scottish Dental Practice Committee (SDPC) argued that the DDRB had taken the expenses element of the pay award into account and that the pay increase should apply to the whole item of service rather than just the expense element.

The Scottish government have agreed that the uplift for independent GDPs should be 0.9 per cent applied to the whole item of service.

News in Brief

Dental anaesthetics seized
Drug dealers across Britain are using dental anaesthetics to dilute cocaine supplies. The Serious Organised Crime Agency has warned that dealers are using large volumes of dental anaesthetics to bulk up the cocaine they sell on the streets. Officers are clamping down on the industry and have seized large amounts of the dental anaesthetics lidocaine and benzocaine. In May, officers seized two tonnes of benzocaine, one fifth of the volume used by dentists in the UK each year.

Tesco dental practice
Tesco is hoping to become the first supermarket in Scotland to open a dental surgery. The company has lodged a planning application with Glasgow City Council to open a three-chair dental practice at its store in Silverburn shopping centre in Pollok. Figures show south-west Glasgow has one of the worst dental health records in Scotland. About three in four of all children under five in the area have a history of tooth decay and/or dental extractions by the time they start school. Sainsbury’s became the first chain in the UK to open a three-chair and vate dental practice in 2008 in Sale, Greater Manchester. Treatment prices at the Sainsbury’s practice have been kept similar to NHS ones, so the practice has proved very popular.

Scottish registration figures
The figures for the number of people registered with an NHS dentist which were recently published by NHS Scotland are not accurate, according to the British Dental Association (BDA). Robert Donald, of the BDA’s Scottish Dental Practice Committee, said: “As the Scottish government has acknowledged, recent estimates of the number of individuals registered with NHS dentists in Scotland have included deceased and duplicated patients. Although work to remove duplicate patient records has begun, some patient records are not matched to Community Health Index numbers. Until they are, it will be impossible to have complete confidence that the registration figures are right.” Lifelong registration was also introduced earlier this year and Mr Donald said: “Our understanding is that almost a quarter of a million individuals included in today’s statistics haven’t visited their dentist during the last three years.”

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