Survey access is still biggest problem for PCTs
Commissioning survey by the British Dental Association shows growing experience of commissioning staff

Ensuring that people have access to NHS dentists is still one of the biggest problems for primary care trusts, according to a recent survey.

The 2010 British Dental Association (BDA) Local Commissioning Survey found that significant challenges remain for the commissioning of dentistry in England, despite the growing experience of commissioning staff and consensus on priorities.

The research found that access to care remains the top priority for primary care trusts (PCTs) with 18 per cent of those surveyed naming it as one of their top three priorities. This echoes the findings of research by the British Dental Association in 2009. Quality was the next concern, appeared in the top three concerns of just over a quarter (28.4 per cent) of PCTs.

The research also identified significant under spending of dental budgets. Just under a fifth (16.4 per cent) of PCTs said they had spent less than 95 per cent of their ring fenced dental budgets in 2009/10, although it is not clear whether the remaining funds were completely unspent or diverted to non-dental spending.

John Milne, chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee, said: “This research illustrates the challenges that persist with commissioning primary dental care and underlines some of the issues the national commissioning board will face when it assumes its duties.”

He added: “It is clear that whoever is responsible for commissioning dental care must be properly supported and have access to appropriate expertise.”

The growing experience of dental commissioning staff is noticeable. Less than 10 per cent of those surveyed had been in their role for under a year according to the 2010 survey, while more than a quarter had served for such a short period in 2009.

However, many of the commissioning leads questioned this year said they did not have an adequate workforce.

Almost three-quarters said they needed additional support, with 18 per cent declaring they did not benefit from the expertise of a consultant in dental public health.

The research also highlighted the growing experience of dental commissioning staff. Around 54 per cent of those surveyed had been in their role for under a year according to the 2010 survey, while more than a quarter had served for such a short period in 2009.

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