Editorial comment

Off with his head...

Yet again we have another ‘misguided’ decision this week only this time it’s to axe the Standing Dental Advisory Committee (SDAC). The BDA has done its bit by writing to Alan Johnson, MP, but whether it will make a difference remains a mystery. But the fact that there was ‘overwhelming’ support to keep SDAC, says it all. The profession’s respect for the Committee is apparent – but armed with the knowledge of its commitment to patient care and quality service is – ironically - disconcerting to say the least. For why, oh why would the government want to eliminate this professional authority, which has been a political stalwart in such uncertain times? If quality dentistry is key for the government, would it not make more sense to work more closely with SDAC instead of pushing it out the door? Or is the plan to weaken the profession further all part and parcel of a much bigger, bleaker picture? We hope not.

Okay, so we all know the old saying – the contract was rolled out without consultation…blah, blah, blah but then ‘ding!’ Let’s get rid of SDAC – for who needs a body that not only draws to ‘simple’ work to accumulate this extra cash or not? The evidence of less complex work is the talk of the profession. Crowns and bridges, and dentures have fallen by 57 per cent, while root canal treatments have decreased by 45 per cent. Should we be worried? These are not small changes by any means – so how does the government want to eliminate this profession from DCPs to academia, but also has the intelligence to produce ‘balanced, strategic thought with informed advice.’ Erm, the government maybe? Oh and also the ‘second-best’ profession please sir. It doesn’t make sense – but never mind - let’s rest assured that there must be good reasons why. England’s CDO has got a new consultant adviser to complement the skills of his team after all, and apparently a ‘specialist’ from secondary care dentistry. Let’s wait and see what the Secretary of State is going to say in reply.

Big fat wallets?

If dentists are earning 15 per cent more under the new contract we should be happy right? (Who wouldn’t be happy with an overall income of MORE than £100,000?) Only there appears to be a few discrepancies here. Firstly – assuming the figures are accurate – is this a result of resorting to ‘simple’ work to accumulate this extra cash or not? The evidence of less complex work is the talk of the profession. Crowns and bridges, and dentures have fallen by 57 per cent, while root canal treatments have decreased by 45 per cent. Should we be worried? These are not small changes by any means – so how are dentists earning more money than ever if they are doing less complex work? Or could it be that this is total rubbish? For by the time the money has been ‘clawed’ back from dentists who have ‘failed’ to meet the treatment targets set for them, these earnings are way, way over exaggerated. And as the chief executive of the NHS Information Centre says: ‘The report reveals the pay of NHS dentists varies GREATLY depending on their contractual arrangements.'
Schottlander announces the winner
Mary Queen of Smiles

Mary Harrison, 72, from Whickham near Newcastle, is the winner of the 2008 Schottlander, Smile of the Year, competition for the denture wearer with the best smile in Britain.

Mary, who has worn dentures since she was 29, dazzled the judges with her radiant smile and won an Italian holiday.

She said: 'I had trouble with one tooth and my husband said to take the lot out. Times have changed, but a lot of people did that in those days.'

Mary has a real zest for life and keeps fit by going dancing and working out at the gym three times a week. 'I’m a very friendly happy person,' she said. 'People always compliment my smile and say my teeth look great.'

Schottlander, launched the Smile of the Year campaign to recognise the millions of people of all ages in the UK who wear dentures and look good.

Dentures are worn by more than 11 million people in the UK, of which one million wearers are people between 16 and 44. Last year alone, the NHS in England and Wales provided dentures for more than 10,000 children and young people aged between six and 24, according to the Dental Practice Board.

Dr Brian Schottlander, whose company makes the award-winning denture systems, said: 'Today, with advances in technology, dentures can look so realistic and natural that they are indistinguishable from real teeth.'

Schottlander won the Queen’s Award for Innovation for its Enigma & Natura range of teeth and denture systems.

We want dentists not fluoride

Councillors in Rossendale would rather see cash spent on another NHS dentist for the borough, than on the fluoridation of water by North West Primary Care Trust (PCT).

The cabinet debated the subject after they heard a talk on fluoridation by a consultant in dental public health and now must decide whether they want a consultation period to consider water fluoridation as a method of reducing tooth decay.

The general consensus was a lot of money would be needed for fluoridation which would be better spent on improving dental services. The public also need to be educated to take responsibility for their own teeth.

Nearly 50 per cent of five year old children in Rossendale have one or more decayed, missing or filled teeth and it is claimed that fluoride reduces the loss of minerals from tooth surfaces and makes teeth more resistant.

However, councillors are of the opinion that the money should instead be used to fund another NHS dentist for Rossendale, of which there are currently only five.

Councillor Darryl Smith said: ‘I am pleased we are being consulted about this, but I think it’s completely pointless. Adding fluoride to water is an example of extracting away responsibility from people. For me it’s like taking a sledgehammer to cracking nuts – if I had a headache, I wouldn’t expect everyone else to take an aspirin.’

The PCT board now has to decide if it wants to request the Strategic Health Authority to look at the possibility of fluoridating public water supplies by October 31.