**Anger over 2011 ARF increase**

Increase in Fitness to Practise cases blamed for 51 per cent rise in dentists’ retention fee; DCPs hit by 25 per cent rise

The decision by General Dental Council (GDC) to increase the annual retention fee (ARF) paid by registrants has sparked outrage throughout the dental profession.

The ARF has been raised due to a number of challenges; a 40 per cent rise in fitness to practise cases, an increase in hearings and a cost of more than £8m on legal fees, not forgetting the plans for a Government-led revalidation, are the main reasons behind the increase.

The ARF for dentists has been increased by 31 per cent and now stands at £576 (due by 51 December 2010); there has also been a 25 per cent ARF increase for DCPs, which now stands at £120 (due by 51 July 2011) and the Specialist Lists fee will now be £72.

GDC Chair Alison Lockyer said: “We have looked very carefully at what it costs us to regulate dentistry.

“We check the quality of education so that new registrants are fit to practise. We make sure only appropriately qualified dental professionals join our registers.

“As a dentist, I recognise that there are dental professionals who will be unhappy with this decision about the ARF.” She added.

Many have contacted Dental Tribune with regards to this issue. One British practice manager commented: “I think it is absolutely disgraceful that the GDC have put the ARF up for DCPs. Why should dental nurses, most of whom earn nothing compared to the likes of dental hygienists and therapists, have to pay the same ARF?”

Dentists have been suggesting that the increases “reveal an alarming ‘out of touch’ mentality at the offices of the GDC” whilst others say it is a “disgrace that the GDC are helping themselves to a 31 per cent pay increase.”

BADD President Sue Bruckel JP said on the ARF increase: “I am appalled that the GDC could be so insensitive to the position of dental nurses. The BADD survey – of which the GDC are aware – showed that the majority of dental nurses in the UK earn £15,000 or less a year; to expect them to pay £120 merely to have the right to practice their profession is unreasonable and unacceptable.

One clinical specialist commented that she felt that such demands were discriminatory against women as many women reduce their working hours to care for their families. Having worked part-time in community dental services, she couldn’t understand why she should pay the same retention fee as a GDP working full time in a private practice, whose salary would be almost six times more than her income.

Many have called for the GDC to introduce a way to pay by instalments. Dental Tribune contacted the GDC on the topic of instalments, who responded: “We have looked at this option on several occasions. We believe it would only be fair to introduce instalments if all registrants were able to pay this way. So far we have not found a solution to allow us to do this in a cost-efficient way. There are a number of issues relating to offering payments by instalments We cannot offer this to all registrants without changing the law (specifically the Dentists Act) through a section 60 order which would take time and money.

“A GDC-run payment system would need to be designed, developed and tested in order to make sure it worked properly. Our research shows this would be a lengthy and costly process. It is likely extra GDC staff would then be needed to maintain and update the information on it.”

They added: “If we looked at the option of using an external service, the kind of companies we could employ to collect payments in instalments are generally not keen on collecting amounts under £400 due to the amount of work involved for the return they receive.”

**FIDA Warning to Manufacturers**

The FIDA (Food and Drug Administration) has warned mouthwash companies Johnson & Johnson, CVS Corporation and Walgreen Company to immediately stop making claims that their products may help protect against cavities, but there is no evidence that the products help protect against cavities, but there is no evidence demonstrating protection from gum disease. The three companies have been told to take “appropriate action” within 15 days. If they don’t, they may face civil or criminal penalties, as well as having their product seized.

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