Doctor, Doctor...
Neel Kothari questions whether the title ‘Dr’ is as misleading as the GDC suggests

Once again the process of ‘consultation’ has resulted in decisions being made in favour of the architec-
ture of the consultation process, despite the overwhelming oppo-
sition from those that have been consulted. The internet dictionary definition of a consultation states ‘1. the act and process of consulting’ and ‘2. a conference for discussion or the seeking of advice, esp from doctors or law-
yers’. So clearly it seems that two sides are meant to have a say in the decision making process.

Given that this process involves two sides putting in time and effort, why is it that, in a time of economic strife, burgeoning regulation, increasing cuts within the public sector and a whole host of unresolved issues with the NHS dental contract, the GDC decide to ‘consult’ with the profession on whether dentists should use the title ‘Dr’?

Pressing Issue
Can we really say that the most pressing issue facing patients within current day dentistry is not, for example, whether complex work may be provided for them under the NHS, but rather a peculiar uncertainty as to whether their ‘dentist’ or ‘dental surgeon’ operating out of a dental surgery is actually medically trained? Of course I am not advocating misleading patients, but at what point do we say ‘enough is enough’? Let’s all use our common sense? A packet of peanuts now contains the warning ‘may contain nuts’; do we really need ‘common sense’? A packet of peanuts is enough, let’s all use our common sense. Within our profession, most dentists think it is appropriate to act like surgeons who all wear hospital white jackets, yet I don’t think any member of the public expect them to be able to provide open heart surgery – after all they are both doctors. That is clearly not the case.

How far do we go?
But exactly how far are we meant to take this? Should those dentists using this title really pay out for re-doing their advertising, letter headed papers, etc, etc, etc? Throughout the UK, private and public sector companies are taking active measures to reduce costs and eliminate unnecessary duplication. Even the British Medical Association has recently published a draft guidance document on ‘Principles of Ethical Advertising’ which states ‘Den-
tists should not use the courtesy title ‘doctor’ (or the abbreviation ‘Dr’) unless they have a PhD or are medically qualified and reg-
istered doctor. Its use as a cour-
tesy title is potentially mislead-
ing to patients and it is important that patients do not assume that they are doctors or dentists are not among them. So many people out there are confused as to whether or not they are dentists, doctors, surgeons or dentists. Do they all wear hospital white jackets? Are they all doctors or dentists? If so, does the public have a similar feeling towards, let’s say, dermatologists?

Preteuce
There are many people out there pretending to be doctors who probably should be stopped. One example of many is the staff at the Cliniquest coun-
ter in my local department store, who all wear hospital white jackets, yet I don’t think any member of the public expect them to be able to treat serious skin disorders. What about the claims from numerous alternative health ‘experts’ who claim to treat anything from acne to cancer with the least evidence based backing?

In my opinion, whilst many people out there are pretending to be doctors, dentists are not among them. So let’s stop this constant degra-
dation of our profession and eliminate unnecessary duplication in costly regulations and instead allocate all available funds to letting dentists do what they are trained to do: treat patients.

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About the author
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