Report highlights commissioning dental services challenges

A number of challenges for local commissioning of dental services must be addressed, according to the results of a survey released today. Alongside the survey is a practical guide to dental commissioning, produced by an independent working group led by Professor Chris Drinkwater of the NHS Alliance, to help primary care organisations to meet those challenges.

The survey, which quizzed both commissioning leads and Local Dental Committee secretaries, found that 60 percent of commissioners said that the national contract did not allow them to help primary care organisations to meet those challenges.

But despite concerns about the constraints placed on commissioners by the national contract, the survey found very positive attitudes towards liaison between practitioners and commissioners. Eighty-seven percent of dentists and 85 percent of LDC secretaries felt the regular contact they had with one another was helpful. Consensus about priorities for dentistry was also obvious with access for new patients the most commonly cited by both groups.

Building on these findings, the Local Commissioning Working Group Map reports on how commissioners connect to the community. The map has a clear focus on quality. The report has a clear focus on quality. It identifies the types of challenges that commissioners face, and provides practical guidance and ideas for addressing these challenges.

Based on the experiences of the review of NHS dental services published in the summer of this year, the report provides a really good resource for commissioners, that encourage excellence in the delivery of primary dental care. Important, in developing the work, Professor Drinkwater has engaged with Professor Jimmy Steele, author of the World Class Commissioning 2010 report, which presents some excellent examples of innovation on the part of commissioners. The report has been produced by an independent working group led by Professor Chris Drinkwater of the NHS Alliance, to help primary care organisations to meet those challenges.

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The survey, which quizzed both commissioning leads and Local Dental Committee secretaries, found that 60 percent of commissioners said that the national contract did not allow sufficient flexibility to meet local oral health needs, with 77 percent of LDC secretaries agreeing. Less than a third of dental leads (29 percent) agreed they received contracting assistance or advice from their strategic health authority and 27 percent said they had not the resources to develop changes to the national contract.

How long primary care trust and local health board commissioning staff had been in post was also investigated. More than a quarter (26 percent) of the primary care organisation dental leads questioned had been in their role for less than a full year, with an average tenure of 3.4 years.

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Greener dental magazine relaunch

The British Dental Practice Managers’ Association (BDPMA) has gone a shade greener with the re-launch of its quarterly magazine.

The publication, which has been re-named *Practice Focus*, is now printed on the Isle of Wight by Crossprint Ltd on 50 per cent recycled paper using vegetable based inks.

It has the same format and number of pages as the previous magazine, with a varied selection of articles and features of interest to practice managers, contributed by industry experts and BDPMA members.

BDPMA chairman, Amelia Bray, said: “We were already fairly kind to the environment because most of our communication is by e-mail and we hold team meetings via conference calls. However, our magazine was something we needed to look at. I’m pleased to say that as an indirect benefit of going green, we actually saved money yet enhanced the look of the magazine.”

The autumn issue of *Practice Focus*, which was recently distributed to BDPMA members, includes features on team development, website design, how to obtain, Investors in People, status and practice management software. Produced four times a year and complemented by a monthly e-newsletter, *Practice Focus* is one of the many benefits of BDPMA membership.

The BDPMA, which began in 1993, is the association for dental management team members and promotes standards of excellence in practice management. It organises management development seminars available to both members and non-members. In addition to the national executive team, there is a network of regional coordinators covering the whole country.

Editorial comment

Air of Steeley optimism

I attended the launch of the BDA’s Local Commissioning Working Group report last week, and it was great to see a BDA report that wasn’t overtly negative in its tone towards the new contract and the framework for local commissioning. That’s not too say it carpeted over the very real issues that exist regarding local commissioning and the varying degrees of difficulty for commissioners and clinicians across the country; rather there was a real sense of ‘let’s get involved and make a difference for everyone concerned’.

This is also highlighted in the high level of involvement in the programme board for implementation of the Steel review. John Milne, the chair of the General Dental Practice Committee at the BDA, is very excited by the challenges ahead for those involved in the implementation of Prof Steele’s recommendations, and it will be interesting to watch the developments over the next few months (and years!) to see how they impact on NHS dentistry for dental professionals, PCTs and patients.

Do you have an opinion or something to say on any Dental Tribune UK article? Or would you like to write your own opinion for our guest comment page?

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Dental Nurses Oppose Annual Fee

The British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN) has condemned the General Dental Council’s (GDC) freezing of the Annual Registration Fee (ARF) for its members.

It describes the GDC’s maintenance of the ARF at £96 per year for dental nurses as “woefully inadequate”.

BADN president, Angie McBain, said the GDC failed to take into account that many dental nurses, especially those in general practice, were paid a minimum wage of less than £12,000 per year.

She added: “In addition, a significant percentage of dental nurses only work part-time, but the GDC still refuses to accept that the imposition of such a high fee on the lowest paid members of the dental team is causing financial hardship. It is outrageous that the GDC expects dental nurses to pay the same registration fee as hygienists and therapists, who are paid a minimum of £25,000 per year.

She pointed out that general nurses, whose starting pay on qualification is nearly £21,000, are only charged £75 a year to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

She said: “Why should a dental nurse, working part-time on minimum wages, be expected to pay £96? By my calculations, the GDC collected just under £4m in registration fees from dental nurses alone, in August. I find it hard to believe that it costs that much to cover the costs of dental nurse registration.

“Already, after the first full year of registration, 10 per cent of registered dental nurses have disappeared from the register because they cannot afford to pay the retention fee, as well as CPD costs and now the new ISA registration fee. This refusal of the GDC to face economic facts is causing, and will continue to cause, immense damage to British dentistry, because many dental nurses simply cannot afford to work.”

BADN is calling for a complete revision of the registration fee to include lower fees for dental nurses and reduced fees for all those registered as working part-time. It wants payments to be spread across at least two instalments over the whole year.

The association is also demanding that it is fully consulted on all matters pertaining to dental nurse registration in the future procedure. There is also an interactive forum in which patients and dentists can participate and a directory through which interested parties can find a cosmetic dentist in their locality.

Maidstone practice opens and brings a smile

Hundreds of people in Maidstone queued patiently to make an NHS appointment at the opening of a state-of-the-art dental studio.

The official opening of the NHS facility, the Kent Smile Studio and private facility, Kent Implant Studio, earlier this month, was documented by ITV Television and local press.

Mayor of Maidstone, Councillor Peter Parvin, officially cut the red ribbon and made an address to staff and the waiting crowd on the opening day.

Many patients in the queue said they had not had been able to access an NHS dentist for several years. Some had previously needed to travel up to 40 miles for an emergency appointment or even attended the neighbouring hospital’s accident and emergency unit. All were thrilled to have the brand-new dental facility in such close proximity to them and their families.

Dr Shushil Dattani, principal dentist and owner of The Kent Smile Studio and Kent Implant Studio, said on the day: “We are very excited to be taking on so many new patients and we are looking forward to working with our colleagues to offer patients access to outstanding implant solutions. I hope that our location, state-of-the-art facility and highly skilled team will also be considered to be an asset to other professionals, when they are seeking a reliable implantology practice with which to work.”

He said both the Kent Smile Studio and the Kent Implant Studio aimed to offer an outstanding service to both patients and referring dentists, as well as high-quality aesthetic and restorative solutions.

For further information on the Kent Smile Studio or the Kent Implant Studio or to obtain a referral pack, call 01622 754 662.

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