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 these challenges.

The survey, which quizzed both commissioning leads and Local Dental Committee secretaries, found that 60 per cent of commissioners said that the national contract did not allow sufficient flexibility to meet local oral health needs, with 77 per cent of LDC secretaries agreeing. Less than a third of dental leads (29 per cent) agreed they received contracting assistance or advice from their strategic health authority, and 27 per cent of LDC's questioned had been in post for less than a full year, with an average tenure of 3.4 years.

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 per cent of dental leads and 85 per cent of LDC secretaries felt the regular contact they had with one another was helpful. Consent about priorities for dentistry was also obvious with access for new patients the most commonly cited for both groups.

Building on these findings, the Local Commissioning Working Group Report maps the commissioning cycle from start to finish, and provides practical guidance, tips and ideas for commissioning general dental services. It also sets each stage of the commissioning cycle in the context of the World Class Commissioning framework, explaining how competencies can be achieved and exceeded. The report is available at: www.bda.org.

Launching the report, Professor Drinkwater said: “The research underpinning this report has presented some excellent examples of innovation on the part of commissioning teams around the country, but it has also demonstrated room for improvement in others. Drawing on examples of best practice and building on the World Class Commissioning competencies framework, this report has a clear focus on quality. We hope that it will be a valuable tool for both new and experienced commissioners, helping to achieve local oral health improvements and reduce inequalities.”

Dr Susie Sanderson, Chair of the BDA’s Executive Board, welcomed its publication: “Effective local commissioning is essential to meeting the needs of local populations. This report provides a really good resource for commissioners, that encourages excellence in the delivery of primary dental care. Important, in developing the work Professor Drinkwater has engaged with Professor Jimmy Steele, author of the review of NHS dental services published in the summer, to ensure that the two pieces of work are complementary. What’s important now is that Government, dentists and the commissioners of care, work together constructively to improve the delivery of care to patients.”

Report highlights commissioning dental services challenges

A dentist from Washington in the US has won an all-expenses paid trip to next year's FDI World Dental Congress in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, thanks to a picture!

The FDI World Dental Federation, in partnership with the Wrigley Company, awarded the 2009 FDI & Wrigley Photographic Award to find out what makes dental care professionals smile.

The grand prize/overall winner of the 2009 FDI & Wrigley Photographic Award was from the United States in the North America region. The winner, Richard from Tacoma, Washington, received the Brazil trip and, as the North America regional winner, he also received the regional prizes of a $1,000 US voucher for photographic equipment, a one-year subscription to the International Dental Journal, and a year's supply of Wrigley chewing gum.

Dental professionals from 65 counties around the world submitted photographs during the 2009 competition, which ran from March 16 – July 8. A variety of entries were received, including funny family photos, landscapes, friends having fun, animals, and candid shots of individuals. All of the photographs were reviewed by a panel of judges for creativity in addressing “what makes you smile,” and six regional winners and one grand prize winner were selected.

The other five regional winners of the 2009 FDI & Wrigley Photographic Award were:

- Africa region: Sandy from Gauteng, South Africa
- Asia-Pacific region: Pujan from Singapore
- Europe region: Jan Eric from Altstatten SG, Switzerland
- Latin America region: Gunther from Cartago, Costa Rica
- Middle East region: Neda from Tehran, Iran

Each regional winner has also received some regional prizes noted above.

In addition, WOHFP (Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programmes) is donating $25,000 US total to the FDI’s World Dental Development Fund (WDDF), which supports oral health education and projects worldwide.
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.

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.

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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 when newly qualified.”

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 restoration solutions.

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

Web-based accessible learning for dental teams

Smile-on is proud to continue supporting all dental professionals by offering flexible education and accessible learning to help build fulfilling and successful dental careers for the whole team.

Together with DENTSPLY, Smile-on News offers dental health professionals the chance to attend and discuss up-to-the-minute dental lectures without having to leave the comfort of their own home, following on from the huge success of last year’s webinar events.

Its innovative webinar series, which is running for the remainder of this year, features world-class lecturers. These include Justin Stewart, who will be discussing dentures and impression-taking and Dr Trevor Bigg, who will be exploring the latest in teeth-whitening tips.

Taking their pick from a large range of accessible webinars suitable for the entire dental team, recipients of the informative Smile-on newsletter can also enter the prize draw to attend webinar events absolutely free.

Smile-on is the source for cutting-edge software and training resources right across the dental industry, recognising as it does, the need throughout the industry for education and training solutions which are flexible, engaging and inspiring.

For more information on the series of webinars or to receive the Smile-on newsletter call 020 7440 8889 or e-mail info@smile-on.com.