ARF - Your Views

We asked for your comments, and we got them...

I find it despicable that we pay for the running of this inept organisation and have no say as to how they are run or how they spend my money. And in addition they have no real teeth, or are about to become enden- lous, when the new COC thing takes over, which is an issue that is beyond imagination.

Brian Rubin, East Sussex

When the rise in ARF hap- pened a few years ago, I was in- censed and wrote to the GDC. I explained that I work part-time in Community Dental Services - why should I pay the same retention fee as a GDP working full-time in private practice probably earning five or six times my salary? I received a standard letter from the GDC saying that they had no facilities to pro rata the fee for part-time staff. As many women are part-time because of having families etc, I feel this is discrimination against women. I still feel very angry about this stupid ruling.

Dr Cate Jarrold, Aldershot

What are we paying for? It seems that bureaucracy has gone mad. How can they warrant a rise of 25 per cent in times of recession when dentists are finding a lower footfall into their practices with addition of CQC inspection at a cost to the practice of around £1,500 (what registered laser- practices have been paying)? For many practices this will have an effect on their ability to cover contractual NHS contracts as these rises were never in the contract costs when they were introduced. Surely this is the time to get every dentist into action against these excessive increases. This on top of the intention to remove the use of the title “Doctor” makes one wonder what the real role of the GDC is.

Name and address supplied

I find the trend across the entire public sector of increasing fees will have to rate of inflation to be disgraceful and unsustainable. If a dentist wishes to practice, he or she must register with this body, the GDC, which represents a monopoly in that regard. Monopolies are expensive and uncompetitive, with a relaxed attitude to their captive audi- ences’ plight.

The GDC gets a large number of frivolous complaints, but almost everything goes to first stage of litigation. I recently endured a frivolous com- plaint, which was eventually thrown out. Although the GDC came to the correct conclusion; the process was cumbersome and resulted in hours of work for my defence lawyers. I was stressed for months. I would have appreciated a call from someone at the GDC to explain the process, which was unfa- miliar and disturbing to me. Instead I received a threatening letter accusing me of six major breaches of my duty of care to patients, based on the say so of one individual.

The GDC is out of touch. In my opinion, the increase in GDC retention fees is a reflec- tion of their lack of innova- tion in dealing with increased complaints, and a failure to budget correctly. The GDC should be pursuing costs against those people who make frivolous complaints, and using the monies acquired to balance the budget. They’ve already grabbed millions from dental nurses and other DCPS, and yet still claim it’s not enough. Something is very wrong with that. It feels to most dentists that we are being forced to pay for a body which likes to punish us whenever it can. The voice of the public drowns out the voice of the profession, the majority of who are caring and conscientious and doesn’t need a big stick to put patients’ inter- est first.

I suppose the extra money will come in useful for their misguided and malicious campa- gnis to prevent dentists using the courtesy title Dr!

Dr Martin Edwards, Den- tal Surgeon

I think it is absolutely dis- graceful that the GDC have put the ARF up for DCPS. As we are all aware, DCPS are made up of dental hygienists, therapists, technicians and dental nurses; all of whom earn differing amounts of money. Why should dental nurses, most of whom earn nothing compared to the likes of dental hygienists and therapists, have to pay the same ARF?

The GDC will not even consider, it seems, a pay monthly scheme for the ARF, even though this would greatly reduce the burden of paying the now £120 out of our meagre pay packets. Surely the GDC should come to some sort of an arrangement where the ARF is based on the registrant’s earnings or at least lowered for dental nurses? The rising cost of the ARF as well as indemnity insurance, the cost of CPD and the lack of decent wages for dental nurses could very well drive more dental nurses away from the profession.

Flustered Practice Manager

This is nothing but extor- tion and we are paying for the failings/incompetence within the GDC as well as those DCPS who did not re-register this year. The GDC need to get their act together and manage their finances, as we have to do in our businesses. Shame we cannot put up our prices by 55 per cent! My anger cannot be put into words.

Name and address supplied

We are paying for the mismanagement of the GDC over the past few years. Every project they have undertaken has become unnecessarily com- plex and expensive. Revalida- tion should be dumped before it gets completely out of hand.

Jenny Pinder

On my wages I can barely afford the current fee. As this is coming into force 2011 I think it would be a good idea if GDC introduced the option paying this in monthly instalments via direct debit. You can pay pretty much everything else (car insurance, house insurance etc) via instalments so I think this option would be welcomed. I know there are a lot of DCPS on a lower wage than me who would struggle and the new fees could possibly make people think twice about choosing den- tistry as their chosen career.

Kate Powell

Why has the CQC not yet decided what the registration should be for their enforced membership? They are waiting to see what the GDC can get away with. Today I have to take time out to go to a compulsory talk about the new induction. No fee for this, but no compensa- tion for loss of UDA time either. Retirement? Foreign climes? Anything! I am a clinician, get me out of here!

Peter F-Jones

Someone please outline the justification for this 51 per cent increase for the ARF when there are fees payable for another regulatory body on the way. Is the wine cellar looking empty at the GDC?

Is it reasonable? The indus- try is in a recession and we are being asked to pay more. I do think that as the GDC is a monopoly the case for increase of its ARF should be referred to the trade’s commission, I know that I personally have not received any increase in revenue this year and it will be financially difficult for the average dental technician to pay these fees.

Name and address supplied

It’s a disgrace! The GDC are helping themselves to a 51 per cent pay increase at a time when every one else is tighten- ing their belts.

The GDC already charge more than the General Medical Council, who charge £532 per annum (www.gmc-uk.org/doc- tors/fees.asp). It should be not- ed that the GMC also give a 50 per cent discount for registrants who have a low income - such as those on further studies.

Some minutes from a GDC finance committee meeting give a few clues as to where the money goes: (www.gdc-uk.org/ NB/Donlyres/F4666199-4064- 4D74-8535-E96C70674458/0/1 51200MinutesConfirmedwebsi te.doc). The highlights point to lax procedures for approving expenses, lack of budget plan- ning, and not having to review their current Final Sal- ary Pension Scheme which had a deficit from last year. It also mentions planning permissions for developing Wimpole - the lavish central London offices.

Are they really on the same planet as us? 51 per cent fees hike, final salary pension scheme? Have they been somewhere else for the last few years? It amazed me to find out that they still have a final salary pension scheme - even open to new recruits. I’m not sure how pleased most dentists would be to realise this is how the ARF is spent.

This isn’t professional self-regulation - it’s difficult to describe their behaviour using civilized language! Maybe it’s time to abandon “self-regula- tion” and allow the profession to be regulated more sensibly by the HPC! For one can find better ways to spend £500 per annum than someone else’s pension scheme, expenses, and flashy offices.

Name and address supplied

A rise of 25 per cent in the ARF is appalling for dental nurses. Unlike hygienists and technicians the salary scale of qualified dental nurses is still dreadful and an insult after working for two years - attend- ing a course and working in their own time - yet they do not qualify. As a hygienist with FEFC, I have in the past tutored dental nurse students and qualified dental nurses studying for their Oral Health Education Certificate, and I was surprised at the syllabus content for both of the qualifications. Perhaps the dental nurses’ professional body should try and educate dentists and fight strongly for better salaries.

Barbara Jones, RDH