The Department of Health has launched a volte face in its proposal for maternity payments as set out in its draft General Dental Service (GDS) statement of dentists’ financial entitlements from April 2009.

The draft letter, sent out by the DH to dentists on October 2, sets down proposals to follow the Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) route and pay 90 per cent of pensionable earnings for the first six weeks, followed by the standard rate of £117.18 per week (2008 prices) for the remaining 35 weeks, which was likely to be much lower than the dentists’ NHS earnings.

But in a surprise statement on October 9, DH announced that ‘the intention is to retain current arrangements rather than mirror SMP’.

The payment for Maternity Leave Payments (MLP) is not the same as SMP which covers 59 weeks. MLP pays a sum equivalent to dentists’ net pensionable earnings, for 26 weeks. In contrast, SMP covers 59 weeks, paying 90 per cent of pay for the first six weeks, but dropping considerably for the final 35 weeks.

The letter also states that the DH does not want to introduce a national scheme to ensure quality, as it believes PCTs are beginning to reward quality themselves.

Regarding seniority payments, the DH is proposing to freeze the scheme for ‘current members’, with no newcomers admitted after March 2009.

Eddie Crouch, from Birmingham local dental committee (LDC), said: ‘Until the new contract, dentists were contributing towards eventual receipt of seniority payments to reward older dentists as they slowed their work rate.

‘Stopping these payments to those approaching 55 isn’t acceptable, as the UDA system currently rewards their work rate. The BDA should look for suitable replacements for those affected.’

He said last summer’s LCD conference requested clarification on seniority payments and passed the following motion. ‘This conference demands that contri- butions should remain available, returned to contributors and not merged into general payments.’

He said the GDP council should take note of the conference’s over- whelming support for the motion.

Peter Ward, chief executive of the BDA, said: ‘The proposed changes raise a number of issues. The BDA is concerned about sever- al of the proposed changes, in- cluding seniority payments, and the short timeframe stipulated for responses to them.

‘An urgent meeting is being sought with the DH to address these concerns.’

Derek Watson, CEO of the Dental Practitioners Association, also addressed the issue. He said: ‘Seniority payments were a con- trick which rewarded dentists by giving them their own top-sliced money back in the latter stage of their careers.

‘PCTs have no intention of re- placing this scheme and dentists’ contributions are being stolen by the DH.

‘This will encourage experi- enced dentists to leave the NHS. The money must be refunded.

‘We have no evidence that PCTs are setting up quality assurance schemes in any meaningful way or doing anything to replace the seniority element.’

The BDS statement of financial entitlements, which will follow the same financial arrangement as SMP which covers 39 weeks, presenting this scheme and dentists’ contributions is being published in due course.

The final version on the pro- posed BDS SFE will be published on the DH’s website in December. Comments are welcome un- til the end of October. []

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GDS financial entitlements revealed

Showcase beats all records

More than 500 exhibitors demonstrated their wares during the BDTA Dental Showcase at ExCeL early this month. With attendance exceeding 7000 visitors. Cutting-edge technolo- gies and innovations were com- pleted by exhibitors, thanks to the DH’s website in December. Comments are welcome un- til the end of October.

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