T he 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 2, the DH wrote to dentists 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 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 entirely determined their work rate. The BDA should look for suitable replacements for those affected.’

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

He said the GDP should take note of the conference’s overflowing support for the motion.

Peter Ward, chief executive of the BDA, said: ‘The proposed changes demonstrated their understanding of dentists’ current financial problems a matter of public record.’

An urgent meeting is being called by the DH to address these concerns.

Neil Sanderson, from PracticeWorks, said: ‘The B4 111 offers complete freedom to practice from the burden of IT system management.’

Denplan has also launched, Membership Plan, to encourage loyalty amongst ‘fee for item’ patients and secure some regular income for dentists.

Denplan has more than 6,500 member dentists nationwide and 1.8 million registered patients.

GDS financial entitlements revealed

More than 500 exhibitors demonstrated their wares during the BDTA Dental Showcase at ExCel earlier this month, attended by 3,000 visitors. Cutting-edge technologies and innovations were complemented by lectures and seminars.

Visitors packed out the world premiere of ‘Smile–on and Dental Protection’s (DP) innovative series, Communications in Dentistry: Options for change, demonstrated by Smile–on founder, Noam Tamir. Stephen Hancock demonstrated through the soap opera style DVD, the essentials of good communication for the dental team. These include willingness to listen, talking to rather than at, eye contact, taking time and having an open-minded attitude.

Kevin Lewis of DP, who introduced proceedings, said: ‘Effec- tive teams are developed through clear communication. It’s only by setting clear goals, efficient leadership and problem-solving skills that team-worked projects come together.’

Clearstep, which focuses on problem solving, launched its new orthodontic systems. MD, Alistair McCanne, said: ‘Our orthodontists are designed to treat any malocclusion, from mild to severe, with minimal discomfort.’

PracticeWorks launched its new Kodak B4 version 111, with functions including automatic software updates and virus protection with a hosted service, a comprehensive appointment di- aly, online booking for patients and a new report manager, which almost instantly locates relevant data. There is also simplified credit-card processing system.

The BDA also supports an urgent explanation from the DH of the apparent decline in the number of complex treatments since the new contract. It is committed to showing work on good practice in commissioning, launched at a special conference in April. In addition, it supports calls for re- view of items such as units of den- tal activity and treatment bands.

The DH proposes the review should address future service provision and how far NHS den- tistry should offer ‘the growing number of treatments which do not address clinical ill-health but are concerned with improving quality of life’. 