GDS financial entitlements revealed

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, set 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 £114.85 for the remaining 35 weeks, which was likely to be much lower than the dentists’ NHS earnings.

But in a surprise statement on October 7, the DH confirmed 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 35 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 to 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 benefits 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 overwhelming support for the motion.

Peter Ward, chief executive of the BDA, said: ‘The proposed changes increase the number of issues. The BDA is concerned about several of the proposed changes, including 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 replacing this scheme and dentists’ contributions are being stolen by the DH.’

‘This will encourage experienced 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 PDS statement of financial entitlements, which will follow the same financial arrangement, is being published in due courses.

The final version on the proposed GDS SFE will be published on the DH’s website in December. Comments are welcome until the end of October.

Modern dentistry needs time, says BDA

More than 500 exhibitors demonstrated their wares during the BDTA Dental Showcase at ExCel earlier this month, attended by over 5,000 visitors. Cutting-edge technologies and innovations were complemented by launches and seminars.

Visitors packed out the world premiere of Smiley-and Dental Protection’s (DP) innovative series, Communications in Dentistry – stories from the practice. Along with Smiley-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: ‘Effective teams are developed through clear communication. It’s only by setting clear goals, efficient leadership and problem-solving skills that team-work f...