Lights, camera, action!
Let's hope that the future of dentistry lies in cost-effective, evidence-based changes, says Neel Kothari

As a recent venturer into the world of practice ownership, the burden of regulation upon our profession is absolutely clear to me and seems disproportionately unfair. Of course it is possible to implement anything under the umbrella of 'patient safety'; but without looking at a thorough cost-benefit analysis we will always struggle to deliver good value for money.

Spending cuts in action
Since we have inherited a Coalition Government, it seems the inevitable cuts have finally arrived. An example of this can be seen in Oxfordshire, where the local council are following Swindon’s example by switching off their entire network of speed cameras based on recent evidence that has shown no increase in road traffic accidents. Isn’t it peculiar how the ‘evidence’ told us that speed cameras save lives, but after the country realised that there is no more money left to spend, it is the ‘evidence’ that is now telling us that they are not needed.

If an independent body were to look at this evidence, I wonder whether they would have come to the same conclusion?

Of course ‘safety’ is paramount, but in the dental world does HTM 01-05 or the mandatory registration with the CQC (with eventual cost to the profession) really improve patient care? Well under the political umbrella that is known as ‘patient safety’ the answer is arguably yes, but what is seriously questionable is whether the cost justifies the risk, after all with both of these measures the financial burden is heavily heaped upon the profession, leaving many in the profession questioning why we are bothering to fix something that is not broken?

Contract criticism
For years, both of the main opposition parties actively criticised the 2006 contract, not just in its content, but also in the way it had been implemented. In opposition, the Tories released ‘Transforming NHS Dentistry’ which pledged to ‘slash bureaucracy’ to improve access to NHS dentists. The then Shadow Health Secretary Andrew Lansley said ‘I am announcing that a Conservative Government will immediately cut waste and bureaucracy and restore access to an NHS dentist to the million who have lost one under Labour.’

Not that I am impatient, but under a Coalition Government the current rhetoric is a little bit more subdued, with Earl Howe, saying that the government will review the details of the ‘system we have inherited’. After a raft of hastily implemented changes in the past few years, let's hope that the future of dentistry lies in cost-effective, evidence-based changes that take the profession along with them, as opposed to the turbulence we all felt back in 2006.

About the author
Neel Kothari works as a principal dentist at High Street Dental Practice in Saffron Walden, Cambridgeshire and provides both NHS and private dentistry. Since his graduation he has regularly attended postgraduate courses and is currently enrolled on the Diploma of Implantology course at the Eastman Dental Institute.

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