Is Improved Access Really Necessary?

The NHS Constitution: a Consultation on New Patients’ Rights, was published on November 10, with a Government pledge that everyone wanting NHS dental access should have it by Spring 2011.

The document states: “There have been problems with NHS dentistry access since the early 1990s. Our 2006 dental reforms have given PCPs the power to contract dental services to meet local needs. In order to expand services wherever they are needed, we have set up a national dental access programme, headed by Dr Mike Warburton, to support the NHS in further improving access.”

Recommendations also include linking some of dental income to registered NHS patients and encouraging preventive care advice. The right to private treatment is proposed, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks, if a patient cannot access an NHS specialist within 18 weeks.

But Eddie Crouch, Birmingham LDC secretary, has hit out at what he regards as the Department of Health’s (DH) ‘blanket policy’ to improve country-wide NHS dentistry access. He says registration in the early 90s was never cross-referenced, hence figures are likely to be inaccurate and inflated. He thinks Government money would be better spent on real problems.

Mr Crouch also thinks the time-span for PCPs to make comprehensive needs’ assessments is too short. But he adds: “I have sympathy with the pressure PCPs are under, they are unlikely to want to object to pressure from central Government, even if they agree with local dentists.”

He is awaiting a response from a letter, drafted to Ann Keen, minister responsible for dentists and LibDem MP, John Hemmings, has had his money would be better spent differently.

Ros Hamburgher, HOBTPC dental public health consultant, said: “We are committed to providing the right kind of dental care and want to ensure everyone has a say in how that service functions in the future.”

NH figure released in August showed that 720,000 more NHS dental patients accessed services in the four quarters ending June 09. Courses of treatment in 2008/09 increased by four per cent (1.4 million) from the previous year and UDAs were up 5.7 per cent.

Chief Dental Officer for England, Dr Barry Cockcroft says access is not only about procurements, but also covers improved contracting and better communication. He says: “How needs are tackled is also about social and cultural education, not just more services. It is important to get the right message through.”

In South Birmingham PCT, it’s been argued we need 25,000 new NHS dentistry patients, but there are simply not that amount of people waiting for an NHS dentist.

“However, many patients complain that orthodontic, periodontal and endodontic treatments are hard to access and home-visits for housebound patients and nursing home residents are inadequately funded. Surely money would be better spent on real problems.”

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