T

this week it was the health department’s turn to an-
swer oral questions and Tim Farron the Lib Dem MP for West-

morland and Lonsdale asked the sec-

etary of state about a practice
due to lose on the retirement of its
dentist next year, with the PCT re-
fusing to give a similar contract to
any dentist buying it effectively re-
ducing its NHS goodwill to zero.

He started by informing the sec-

etary of state, Alan Johnson,
that the practice in Ambleside
in my constituency served 5,000
NHS dental patients across a
geographical area of more than
90 square miles. The PCT in Cumb-

ria is planning to close down the
Ambleside practice in March next
year, when the current dentist re-
tires.

‘Given that already 50 per
cent of my constituents do not
have access to an NHS dentist’, he
continued, ‘does the Secretary of
State agree that the PCT in Cumb-

ria should ensure that the NHS
dental practice in Ambleside re-
mains open?’

Unusually Alan Johnson him-
self replied saying that PCTs had
an obligation to ensure that there
is proper dental provision in
their areas. ‘Under the new pro-
cedure and contract, the PCT is
obliged to ensure that proper NHS
dental provision is available,’ he
said and pledged that if the MP
would like to write to him about
the issue he would look into it.

Whether this promise has any
effect remains to be seen, but the
PCT seems to be digging its feet in.

It was reported in local media that
a South Lakes dental practice had
stepped in to try to prevent the
practice closure, but had had its
offer to treat NHS patients turned
down.

Grange Dental announced
that it was taking over the prem-
ises of NHS dentist Mike Hynes
when he retires in spring next
year. But the plans to provide co-
cover for his 3000 patients has been
rejected by the Cumbria PCT.

Written answers
Sir Paul Breesford, dentist
and Conservative MP asked
whether there had been discus-
sions he had had with the General
Dental Council on whether den-
tal bleaching might be carried out
by qualified hygienists or qualified
dental auxiliaries after training by
a dentist either in a surgery or at a
patient’s home using surgery sup-
plied equipment.

Replying, minister Ann Keen
said that dentistry was self-regu-
lat ing and the GDC was independ-
ent of Government. She under-
stood that the GDC considers
that tooth whitening constitutes
the practice of dentistry and that on-
ly registered dentists are suitably
trained and competent to carry it
out. She continued: ‘Dental pro-

fessionals are required to prac-
tice within their respective pro-
fessional boundaries and to only
undertake work which they are
trained and competent to do. How-
ever, she understood that the GDC
was currently reviewing the scope
of practice of dentists and dental
care professionals and expected to
consult on its proposals in 2008.

Sir Paul also asked what
changes to the system of dental
contracts the NHS Dental Contract
Implementation Group had intro-
duced in the last 12 months, and
what changes they plan to intro-
duce in the next 12 months. Ann
Keen, however, told him that the
group’s function was to monitor
and provide feedback to the De-
partment on the implementation
of the reforms. It was for the De-
partment rather than the group to
make or plan policy changes.

Log onto

Portable oral healthcare advice, online for
you and your patients
you and your patients, the site gives helpful interactive advice and information, developed in consultation with
dental professionals.

To find out more, log onto www.BetterOralHealth.info
Chewing Orbit Complete sugarfree gum helps prevent tooth decay by 40%¹