Clawback payments reach £120m

Around half of dental practices have fallen short of their targets and will have to pay money back to their local health authorities.

The ‘bochted contract’ is forcing dentists to give back £120m to the NHS because all but a handful of targets agreed with local health authorities.

The British Dental Association fears these clawbacks may put some practices out of business and could lead to more dentists quitting the NHS.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by DPAS, provider of dental insurance that supports practices in theVT schemes, reveal that although thousands of patients are still on waiting lists for NHS treatment, five million fewer treatments were carried out in 2007-08 than were budgeted for by the health service.

In Leicester, for example, more than 50 per cent of UDAs (units of dental activity) have not been delivered and 21 dental practices face repatriations of £50,000 or more. Across the country, 89 per cent of primary care trusts responded to a survey that found a total of 414 contracts were targeted by practices which were to be repaid by £50,000 or more.

Peter Ward, the chief executive of the BDA, said that dentists who failed to meet their targets in the first year were likely to have failed to do so again last year, creating a ‘roll-over effect’.

He said: ‘Once again this highlights problems with a target-driven contract that contains one crude measure of performance, which has long been criticised by the profession and patient representative groups.’

Dr Cockcroft: ‘The access statistics are old’

Shadow Health Minister Mike Penning today said the NHS’s access statistics ‘simply unacceptable’ and said: ‘Patients have now had to endure more than two years of a failed dental contract, and because of Labour’s complacency access is still continuing to decline. More than 1,200,000 people have directly suffered due to the Government’s bochted reforms. Rather than persisting with such a ludicrous approach, Ministers must instead focus on patient care in order to make warm words a reality.’

However Barry Cockcroft, Chief Dental Officer claimed that ‘the access statistics are old’ and said: ‘They cover a two-period looking backwards that does not reflect the extra £209m investment in NHS dentistry this year and all the new NHS dental services that are opening now.’

He added: ‘Our latest figures show that there were 855 more NHS dentists in 2007-08 than in the previous year. There are new NHS dental practices opening all the time with dental companies as well as individual dentists bidding to provide more NHS dental services around the country. This proves our reforms are working.’

Social networking site launch

A trio of inspiring and innovative teachers won awards at this year’s Dental Defence Union Educational Awards.

Alison Grant at Bristol Dental School, won the award for DCP (dental care professional) Teacher of the Year. Ms Grant said: ‘It’s great to receive this recognition. I was first inspired to go into dentistry by the enthusiasm of a hygienist who treated me as a teenager and I want to thank her. DCP teachers are not just teaching students to pass an exam; we are teaching them to become dental hygienists and I believe that communicating our enthusiasm is an essential part of this.

The award for Dental Teacher of the Year was won by Professor Dayananda Samarawickrama at Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Professor Samarawickrama dedicated the award to his students, colleagues and school and said: ‘I have been humbled by this experience and I’m obviously very pleased to have won. My late father used to say that education is the best gift one can give so it is particularly important to me that I have won this award for my work as a teacher.’

While Stephen Brookes of the Oxford Deanship scooped the Vocational Teacher of the Year award. He said: ‘It’s very gratifying to be recognised by my peers for all my efforts over the past 12 months and the previous 18 years. I’d like to thank my vocational trainees, my course advisor and the Oxford Deanship. Having been nominated a couple of years ago, it’s wonderful to have actually won the award this time.’

Rupert Hoppenhovenheads, head of the DDU (Dental Defence Union) praised the winners and said: ‘Their commitment to dental education over many years and their level of experience is clearly crucial in enabling them to communicate effectively with their students and DPs (vocational dental practitioners) in the classroom or surgery.

They provide an informed and invaluable source of advice and guidance to young dental professional at the start of their careers.

The winner in each awards category received £1,000 towards the cost of educational materials for their schools or Vocational Training (VT) schemes.

The theme of the day was ‘Education, Ethics and Aesthetics’ and after the finalists’ presentations, Derrick Willmott, professor of orthodontics at Sheffield University and dean of the faculty of dental surgery and Richard Ashcroft, professor of bioethics at Queen Mary University of London addressed the issue of whether purely cosmetic dentistry and where aesthetic treatments may have a therapeutic outcome.

Nicholas Peacock, a barrister from Halifax Chambers, spoke about the factors to bear in mind when providing cosmetic treatment, to help avoid a complaint to the General Dental Council or a claim.