Inquiry reveals ‘shortcomings’ at Belfast Dental Hospital
Lack of support and excessive workloads caused problems says report

Health Minister for Northern Ireland Edwin Poots has informed Members of the Legislative Assembly of the results of an inquiry that has uncovered evidence that shortcomings may have led to serious deficiencies in the standards of care afforded to patients at Belfast Dental Hospital.

The inquiry was instigated in February 2011 by the then Health Minister and was led by Brian Fee QC, following a recall of 417 patients by the oral medicine service at the hospital. It has emerged that 22 of those patients were either diagnosed or referred far later than recommended and that they represented a ‘major concern’. It was found that difficulties in one department arose from excessive workloads and a lack of adequate administrative support and further problems uncovered included 156 unfiled items, 93 missing charts, 161 ‘hospital concerns’ and problems with the appointment system. The inquiry made a total of 45 recommendations and the Belfast Trust maintains that it has learned ‘valuable lessons’ from the experience.

Both Poots and Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust Colm Donaghy have offered their apologies to the patients and have professed an understanding of the “serious deficiencies” in the oral medicine department. Donaghy maintained that the Trust has always acted in the best interests of its patients and stated: “The extent of the impact that delay in diagnosis or referral had on the outcome...is unknown at this stage... according to the report a Serious Adverse Incident Complaint should have been raised earlier and we accept that. We also accept that in terms of communicating and escalating the issue we should have done that at an earlier stage in terms of the former processes, to keep others informed in terms of the progress that was being made.

“What I would have to say is the people involved in this did not deliberately keep this issue secret or quiet, they were concerned about continuing to provide care for the patients involved and always acted in the interests of those patients.”

Poots declared the situation to represent an unacceptable failure on the part of the Trust and warned that such a situation “cannot be permitted to happen again”. The Chair of the Assembly Health Committee Michelle Gildernew also drew attention to the seriousness of the events and Conall McDevitt of the SDLP stated that he could not think of a more serious situation involving a single trust.

The results of the inquiry can be viewed at www.dhssps.ni.gov.uk/executive_summary_dental_inquiry.pdf.

Deep in Brief London

Rock legend celebrates NHS birthday
Rock star Ozzy Osbourne led tributes in celebration of the 63rd birthday of the NHS. Born in Birmingham in 1948, the same year the NHS was created, the Black Sabbath front man was one of the first generation to be delivered by NHS doctors. He was also treated by emergency services and the NHS when he was rushed to intensive care in Slough, following a near-fatal accident in 2005. Ozzy Osbourne had this message for NHS staff: “If it wasn’t for the hardworking staff of the NHS following my serious quad bike accident I may not be here today to continue my career. I want to say a big thank you to all of the dedicated doctors, nurses and everyone else who makes up the NHS across the country.”

No exhibits, we’re Canadian
The majority of dentists in Canada find it difficult to make time to visit dental exhibitions, figures in a new report by the country’s Dental Industry Association suggest. More than 70 per cent of the dentists surveyed said they spent less than three hours on exhibition floors during conventions. While half said they spent two hours or fewer, included lack of time, attending lectures or courses, and social interaction with colleagues and peers. Dentists from Ontario were more likely to visit a convention that had no associated exhibits or other on-floor events. Most dentists said that they would visit more exhibitions if they were given product samples or could watch hands-on demonstrations or other on-floor events.

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