Ups and downs of NHS Dentistry 2010/11

New reporting gives clarity to NHS dentistry usage

The NHS Dental Statistics for England: 2010/11 has recently been released by the NHS Information Centre.

This year the paper has progressed into a comprehensive report bringing together a range of information, such as the number of dentists working for the NHS, the amount of treatments that are carried out and the number of patients that are seen by an NHS dentist. One interesting fact showed that 45.3 per cent of NHS dentists are female.

There was however a key finding to the report, which revealed that the number of fluoride treatments had substantially increased since 2009/10 for both adults and children; 8.1 per cent of all child treatments included a fluoride varnish, while 1.2 per cent of all adult treatments included a fluoride varnish.

The figures also revealed that since 2006 an extra one million patients have been seen by an NHS dentist, putting the final figure for the two-year period, ending in June 2011, at more than 29 million. Alongside these figures, in the past 24 months around 56.3 per cent of the population have received dental care. Even though these figures are promising, the report also revealed that over the same period 26,000 fewer children had seen an NHS dentist.

Commenting on this figure, Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter said: “It is disappoint-
ing to see the number of children visiting an NHS dentist has failed to grow over the past five years. Children should be attending the dentist as soon as possible in order for them to develop good oral health habits which they can carry through to adulthood.

The report also highlighted the 2.2 million cases of complex treatment, such as bridgework and dentures, which were carried out in 2010/11.

The report stated that 1.2 million of these complex cases had been carried out on non-paying patients; however, it was also clarified that out of the 59.2 million course of dental treatment in 2010/11, only 9.0 million were carried out on non-paying adults.

According to NHS Dental Statistics for England: 2010/11, one reason for this may be a lower standard of dental health among non-paying adults.

Dr Carter said: “Although the figure still equates to more than every other person in England having access to an NHS dentist, it is the view of the Foundation that more needs to be done to break down the barriers for everyone. With rising household budgets it is important that people don’t view their dental health as a luxury – it is one you most certainly cannot afford to take for granted.”

John Milne, Chair of the British Dental Association’s General Dental Practice Committee, said: “The increasing number of patients who can access care is good news for those that it benefits, although the regional variations in the proportions of the population accessing care, and fact that the percentage of children doing so remains below the March 2006 baseline, serve as reminders that there is no room for complacency about the overall improvement.

“New dental contract and commissioning arrangements for England are now being developed that should benefit dentists and their patients by creating a more prevention-oriented, quality-focused approach. Piloting for these arrangements is now beginning and it will be important that the Government maintains a constructive dialogue with profession as they are taken forward.”

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