Dentists face OFT investigation

Dentists across the country will once again come under investigation

T here have been many heated debates regarding the costs of dental treatment in England, especially after Channel 4’s Dispatches ‘The Truth about your Dentist’ was broadcast. However, the battle for dentists is not quite over yet.

Amid widespread agreement that the NHS is simply not working, the consumer watchdog Office of Fair Trading has announced that it will launch a market study, to examine whether the private and NHS dentistry markets are working well for patients. The study, which will look into the information provided in the £7.2 billion dental market, will include investigating the choice of treatments that are offered and the way complaints are handled.

Although the OFT has stated that it recognises the high standards of oral care in the UK, however it remains determined to examine several concerns raised by consumer bodies such as Which? who say that patients are confused over dental treatments and prices.

A report issued by the OFT said: the study will focus on how dentistry services are sold, whether patients are given appropriate information to help them choose between dental practices, the types of treatments on offer and different payment methods in the context of both NHS and private dentistry. It will also look at how easy it is to change dentists, and whether the current system for customer redress works.

The study will also examine whether there are any unnecessary barriers to new practices entering either private or NHS funded markets, and consider the issue of professional restrictions on direct access to specialists or providers of auxiliary services, such as hygienists.

Whilst the OFT completes the study, the Department of Health will aim to try and rewrite the current contracts of NHS dentists, which sees NHS dentists get paid an average of £90,000 a year.

Currently, under the pilot schemes which are being carried out across England, dentists will no longer be paid a set fee for treating patients. The ‘The Truth about your Dentist’ programme was broadcast. However, the study the Department of Health will aim to try and rewrite the current contracts of NHS dentists, which sees NHS dentists get paid an average of £90,000 a year. Currently, under the pilot schemes which are being carried out across England, dentists will no longer be paid a set fee for treating patients.

Sonya Branch, the OFT’s Senior Director for Services, Infrastructure and Public Markets, was quoted in The Telegraph saying: “Patients appear to be confused about the prices they are being charged and concerns have been raised that they may not be getting sufficient information or adequate choice over the dental treatments they receive.

“We also note that the costs of private dental treatment in England are among the highest in Europe.

“Given the current strains on people’s finances, we think it is a good time to examine whether competition is working effectively to drive up the quality of private and NHS dental services and deliver better value for money for consumers.”

The OFT has stated that it recognises the high standards of oral care in the UK.
Editorial comment

Well, Showcase is almost upon us and we at Dental Tribune are getting ready to pack our bags and make our way to Birmingham’s NEC, for three days of discovery and not seeing natural daylight!

If you are making the pilgrimage to dentistry’s largest exhibition make sure you come by Stand W08 and say hello, leave your comments about Dental Tribune and find out more about the educational products and services provided by our sister company Smile-on.

And if you want to hear about the latest development from both the Smile-on and Dental Tribune team, including one very exciting development that the DT team have been working on, come to W08 on Thursday 19 October at 12pm and enjoy a glass of something bubbly as we reveal all!!

Finally, those of a gadgety nature make sure you scan the QR code on page 18 and follow Dental Tribune on Twitter.

GDC calls for wider response

In April this year the General Dental Council (GDC) asked registrants to respond to its Standards Review by answering a questionnaire on the issue.

There has been a good response so far, but the GDC is keen to hear from as wide a range of registrants as possible.

The GDC registers the entire dental team—dentists, dental nurses, orthodontic therapists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, dental technicians and clinical dental technicians—and currently has more than 95,000 dental professionals on its registers.

‘Standards for dental professionals’ is the regulator’s key ethical guide for registrants and any changes will have a direct impact on their day-to-day working lives, so it’s important that as many as possible have their say.

The questionnaire, which is open until the end of December, is just one part of a number of activities that will feed into the review. The aim is to produce comprehensive new guidance for all members of the dental team by the end of 2012.

One issue in particular has sparked a lot of comment and it is worth noting that draft guidance on ethical advertising on ethical advertising will be considered by the Standards Working Group as part of this review, rather than as a separate document. All the research that the GDC has gathered to date on the issue as well as all the comments that have been received will be considered as part of this wider review of the standards.

Further information about the Standards Review and the questionnaire can be found here: http://www.gdc-uk.org/GDCCalendar/Consultations/Pages/Review-of-Standards.aspx

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The smile’s fake. The whiteness isn’t.
Could you use a £20m investment?

It is rare that one hears about an investment opportunity which offers a catalyst for growth rather than one which encourages dentists to opt out of the profession, but one such opportunity has just been announced. Dr Amarjit Gill has teamed up with a seasoned dental entrepreneur to create a group of dental practices in the North of England. The duo have initial financial backing to invest up to £20m in an existing dental group – and would even be open to approaches from an alliance of individual practices looking to merge into one entity.

The pair have ambitious expansion plans to create a network of practices in the North of England and see great potential to establish a regional cluster. They will then use their considerable business acumen and dental expertise to relieve the current owners of the increasing burden of bureaucracy and low staff morale, allowing them the breathing space to perform better clinically. They also have plans to streamline the practices and ultimately increase the proportion of turnover derived from more sought after ‘lifestyle’ treatments.

In 2010 Dr Amarjit Gill, BDS MFGDP was voted one of the top five most influential dentists in the UK by the readers of Dentistry Magazine and in 2011 relinquished the mantle of the British Dental Association’s Presidency after a year at helm. His business partner, who has chosen to remain discreet and allow Dr Gill to front the bid, is the ex-Chief Executive of a successful dental corporate. Between them they have the business acumen, the influence and the funds to establish a new style of dental practice and help dentists do what they do best.

As Amarjit Gill commented: "We are going public with our search as we feel there must be a number of practices and groups who are looking for a strategy to grow, but so far have not found the right route. Selling to a major corporate is not necessarily right for everyone and the loss of identity and control is only attractive if the Principals are considering leaving the profession. By contrast we are initially looking for a group of practices with a turnover above £10 million who looking for a way to expand and to leverage an investment to build on their success."

Interested practices can contact Amarjit by contacting him directly by email - gill@smilesahead.biz - to set up an exploratory meeting.

£600,000 funding for UCL

Dr Stefano Fedele and Professor Stephen Porter of the UCL Eastman Dental Institute have recently been awarded over £600,000 in prestigious research grants and PhD scholarships. The funding will support a number of clinical and translational research projects, which will be conducted at the UCL EDI.

Dr Fedele, Senior Clinical Lecturer, and Professor Porter, Institute Director, have received grants from the National Institute of Health Research – Research for Patient Benefit Scheme (NIHR-RPBR) and Arthritis Research UK, and been awarded a UCL Grand Challenge PhD Scholarship for work in relation to two research projects: LEONIDAS-1 and LEONIDAS-2. These multicentre studies will investigate the effectiveness of a novel medical device in lessening dry mouth symptoms caused by radiotherapy and Sjogren’s syndrome and have the potential to revolutionise the management of individuals affected by this debilitating disorder.

Dr Fedele and Professor Porter have also secured funding from the International Serious Adverse Event Consortium (ISAEIC) and a second UCL Grand Challenge PhD Scholarship to lead an international research project on the genetics of bisphosphonate-related osteonecrosis of the jaws: the GENVABO study. This is a genome-wide association study (GWAs) that will help to discover potential gene variants associated with the risk of developing jaw osteonecrosis. The results will enable clinicians to identify individuals genetically predisposed to this debilitating and incurable drug-induced adverse side effect.

CQC launches fees consultation

The consultation sets out proposals to extend the fees scheme to providers of out-of-hours services, who will register for the first time with CQC from April 2012, and adjust parts of the existing scheme.

The consultation also sets out CQC’s strategic approach to fees for future years, which will involve more detailed consultation over the next year for phased implementation from 2013/14 onwards.

The three main proposals for the April 2012 fees scheme are:
- extend the scheme to providers of primary care out-of-hours services entering the registration system from 1 April 2012
- reduce the fees in the middle bandings for providers of dental and independent ambulance services
- reduce the fee in the lowest level banding for providers of adult social care services without accommodation

Cynthia Bower, CQC’s chief executive, said: “At this stage we are only proposing some minor changes to the fees scheme. These will be the first steps in a longer term strategy for a scheme that we will develop in close cooperation with providers.”

SO WHY DON’T THEY MENTION THIS?
Statistics published this month show that cancer waiting times have improved over the past year, despite a general growing pressure on waiting times in the health service and an increase of more than 100,000 more people in England being seen by a cancer specialist.

Official statistics from the Department of Health published in September 2011 show a steady improvement in waiting times for cancer patient referrals and treatment. The report, called ‘Waiting Times for Suspected and Diagnosed Cancer Patients in England 2010-2011’, also shows the NHS hit targets for cancer referrals seen at two weeks, and treatment targets at 51 days and 62 days.

Between April 2010 and March 2011 more than one million patients were seen by cancer specialists following an urgent referral by a GP – an increase of more than 100,000. A total of 95.5 per cent were seen within 14 days of referral, compared to 94.9 per cent in the previous year. Around 45,000 patients were not seen within 14 days of referral.

The performance is encouraging news for mouth cancer patients where early diagnosis and treatment improve survival rates from 50 per cent to 90 per cent. Referrals within 14 days for suspected head and neck cancers improved to 96.5 per cent in 2010-2011, from 95.7 per cent in the previous year.

The good performance for cancer referral and treatment is in contrast to other parts of the NHS. The number of hospital patients in England waiting over the 18-week guarantee has jumped by a third in the past year. Of the 500,000 people seen in July 2011, more than 28,000 had waited beyond the target - a 54 per cent rise from the same month last year. Those who waited over six months rose by 55 per cent to more than 9,000. Overall the NHS in England is continuing to hit its targets of seeing 90 per cent of patients in 18 weeks.

Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter, said: ‘The NHS is doing a very good job once cancer patients are in the system. The challenge in relation to mouth cancer is to ensure that everyone recognises the warning signs before it is too late. They include ulcers which do not heal within three weeks, red and white patches in the mouth and unusual lumps or swellings in the mouth. ‘Our message to everyone is ‘If in doubt, get checked out’.”

Diabetics told to brush their teeth

Many people with diabetes are unaware of the close links between the state of their oral health and their risk of developing complications, medical researchers warn in the latest issue of the British Dental Journal (BDJ).

The authors of the BDJ report, Oral health awareness in adult patients with diabetes: a questionnaire study, maintain that inflammation from swollen gums can increase the severity of diabetes, worsen cardiovascular disease and increase mortality from oral cancer and oral pre-malignancies.

They also point out that longstanding, poorly-controlled diabetes appears to speed up the progression of gum disease, which, if left untreated, can result in loss of teeth.

But a survey of 229 adults attending a diabetes clinic found that awareness of any association between dental health and their medical condition was poor. Only 13 per cent knew that swollen or tender gums could be affected by diabetes, or vice versa, while fewer still (12 per cent) were aware that there could be a link between loose teeth and diabetes.

“Dental and oral self-care tasks were rated as less important than other diabetes self-care tasks, such as taking prescribed medication or having regular eye checks,” said the researchers from Warwick Medical School. “Around one-third of patients rated daily flossing as the least important health related activity.”

Commenting on the findings, the British Dental Association (BDA)’s Scientific Adviser, Professor Walmsley, said: “This study adds to the growing body of evidence linking oral health to general health and well-being. “It’s important that health-care professionals, dentists included, make people with diabetes more aware of this link.

“Brushing teeth twice a day, every day, with a fluoride toothpaste, flossing daily and seeing the dentist regularly will go a long way to protect teeth and gums and, it seems, reduce the risk of developing complications from diabetes.”

The BDA hopes the development of a new, outcomes-focused contract in England, (pending the results of pilots launched earlier this month), will make it easier for dentists to adopt a more preventive approach to care.

Win a free flight to NYC with Dental Tribune!

In 2011, Dental Tribune International will launch the Global Dental Tribune Awards to celebrate excellence in dentistry.

This is a fantastic opportunity for dental professionals to show just how remarkable they are and compete against others in their own areas on friendly terms.

There will be free economy flights to New York City to join us at the Award Ceremony, which will be held at the Greater New York Dental Meeting on November 28, 2011 in the special events hall.

All Dental Tribune readers worldwide are cordially invited to submit their applications online WITHOUT REGISTRATION FEE by October 21, 2011.

Simply choose your categories and submit one PDF (500-1000 words) and one-six images in jpeg format. Explain why your practice or the individual/team deserves to win. You can nominate yourself, a team or an individual.

The winners will receive an all expenses paid trip to the Greater New York Dental Meeting, USA.

Submit your application online now at http://www.dentaltribune.com/awards/apply

Good luck!
Cancer divide means hard times ahead for small charities

A new survey looking into public support for cancer charities has uncovered a worrying disparity in the proportion of donations throughout the sector.

The study revealed that high profile charities for cancers such as breast cancer were more likely to be donated to (46 per cent), whereas people were less likely to donate to lung cancer charities (16 per cent).

Of the other cancers, the findings showed that only one in 33 (three per cent) would be more likely to donate to skin cancer, one in 25 (four per cent) to testicular and brain cancers while one in 20 (five per cent) preferred to support prostate and bowel cancers.

Cancer of the liver received votes from only three people in the survey, making it the least chosen of the cancers on the list while mouth cancer obtained just eight votes.

The results also revealed that cervical cancer featured highly on the list, with almost half of respondents (45 per cent), favouring it in their top three. Overall, the figures suggest that female cancers are more widely supported than male-associated cancers.

However, the survey worryingly showed that one in four people were less likely to support cancers which are seen as preventable.

The British Dental Health Foundation, organisers of awareness campaign Mouth Cancer Action Month throughout November said the research was concerning and are encouraging more people to support their cause.

Chief Executive of the Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter, said: “Unfortunately, the recession and a squeeze on household incomes have meant that some charities have financially suffered as a result. Now, more than ever, instead of donating to a number of charities, some people might choose to prioritise just one, and as the results of this study have shown, mouth cancer is rarely thought upon.

“Regular donations are a vital part of our fundraising efforts. Mouth cancer is now diagnosed in 6,000 people in the UK every year, and without early detection half will die. It is important that we continue to raise awareness to the early warning signs of the disease, as well as the risk factors – to be able to do this, we are asking for your continued support and increasing donations.”

Some charities suffer due to their profile.
Practice refurb gives patient boost

Holmforth Dental Surgery has seen a huge boost in custom in the last few months after Katrina Hayes-Sinclair decided to expand and refurbish the business using a six-figure loan from Lloyds TSB Commercial.

Holmforth Dental Surgery, located on Huddersfield Road, was purchased by qualified dentist of 18 years Katrina at the beginning of this year when she bought out her previous partner.

Since the implementation of the expansion strategy, Holmforth Dental Surgery has gone from strength to strength. Having surpassed the set NHS target at the end of March, the practice has diversified its services to offer cosmetic dentistry.

The launch of the new specialist dental implant service has resulted in a huge boost in patient numbers for the surgery, with last month seeing numbers rise to the practice's largest patient base to date.

Katrina said: “The increase in demand the business has received since launching our cosmetic dental care has been outstanding. Taking on several hundred more patients over the last few months has been a direct result of our most recent service, and the feedback from both regular and new patients has been consistantly positive.

“Dental implants are fast becoming the preferred alternative to dentures, and the recent boost in custom is testament to their popularity. This specialist service combined with the surgery refurbishment has given us a competitive edge over other practices in the area.

“The decision to purchase the whole practice was a daunting one, as after working with a partner for ten years I was used to sharing business decisions. However the experience I gained within that time put me in great stead to branch out alone and by working closely with Lloyds TSB Commercial I had constant access to consistent support and guidance.”

Toothfairy’s dream house?

Artist Gina Czarnecki is planning on using milk teeth in her latest artwork.

To date, her career focuses on the relationship between humans and advances such as genetic research, disease and even evolution.

Throughout her projects, Gina has worked with biotechnologists, computer programmers, dancers and sound artists; however, this time Gina is working with stem cell researcher professor Sara Rankin to create Palaces – a glass-like castle expected to look like a beautiful underwater coral castle. It will be exhibited at art and science venues across the UK starting in 2012 and The Herbert, Coventry in 2013.

Her artwork raises questions on life’s developments in society, and being one of three sculptures where ‘cast-offs’ from human donors, such as teeth, bones and fat, have been used, Palaces will be undoubtedly be just as questioning.

The finished artwork is expected to look like a beautiful underwater coral castle. It will be exhibited at art and science venues across the UK starting at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, in December 2011, followed by the Science Museum, London, in 2012 and The Herbert, Coventry in 2013.

GDC to meet registrants in the north east of England

Following the success of four registrant events held across the UK at the beginning of this year, the General Dental Council is holding another one in Newcastle in November.

Dental professionals from in and around the city are being asked to come along to the Hilton Newcastle, Gateshead Hotel at 6pm on the 8 November 2011 to find out about how the GDC’s work affects them.

They will also have the chance to take an active role in workshops either on the review of GDC Standards or the review of the GDC’s Continuing Professional Development scheme.

The event is free and participants will be awarded two hours of verifiable CPD.

Director of Policy and Communications at the GDC Mike Browne says such events are a valuable source of feedback:

“This will be a great opportunity for registrants and GDC staff to speak directly to each other, and really find out what people are concerned about. We are carrying out some important pieces of work at the moment on Standards and CPD and it will be good to hear exactly what dental professionals think.”

Any dental professionals interested in attending can book online at www.gdc-uk.org.

It should be noted that places are limited, so early booking is advised.