The only constant is unforeseen change

Minister for dentistry looks to the future in keynote speech

The minister for dentistry took to the stage to urge dentists to embrace change in a keynote address to Foundation Dentists and trainers.

Earl Howe (pictured), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and, made the speech at the Career Opportunities for UK Dentists Conference, held in London earlier this month.

Addressing a packed auditorium, Earl Howe gave a rallying call for dentists to be involved in the political process surrounding the latest wave of changes in dentistry: “You are the future of the profession and all of you need to understand and be engaged in the development of policy in the area for which you have been trained.

“I am aware that there has been lots of change in dentistry in the last few years, and I’m sure many of you must be wondering what sort of opportunities there are for you once you had graduated from your dental schools. Looking around the room I see a few more mature heads scattered about, and I’m sure that they will tell you that paradoxically one of the few constants in life is unforeseen change. It is how you respond to those changes that it is crucial - some people see it as an opportunity, others see it as a threat - but it is a constant feature in the world of medicine and dentistry as it is throughout the world of work.”

Discussing the proposed reforms to the current dental contract Earl Howe said: “As dentists you will be dealing with dental conditions that are varied, changing in nature and changing in prevalence. To help you provide services and patient management has to constantly evolve to align with changes in people’s health and improvements in methods of treatment and technology.

“We know that the currency of any contract has significant impact on the nature of services delivered. Historically, dentists pay was based on an item of service methodology. At a time when we know that the prevalence of active dental caries is decreasing most reasonable people would agree that it would be perverse to continue to rate remuneration to activity. But it’s vital that not only do patients get the most appropriate treatment and dentists are appropriately rewarded; but also that taxpayers get value for money for their investment.

“The coalition government is committed to introducing a new dental contract based on the three elements of registration, capital and quality. We are keen to develop quality indicators for use in monitoring services and crucially for the first time outcomes for primary care dental services. We are very grateful for the cooperation we have been receiving from the dental associations and clinicians from all fields in dentistry in developing high quality indicators.”

“It’s complex and challenging work but I’m sure that there will be a need for indicators to evolve with experience. It’s vital to the morale of the profession and the satisfaction of your careers that we get it right and we keep their roles under review.”

Earl Howe added: “The world you are entering is now significantly changing and changing for the better. As minister I am committed to both sustaining that change and making sure that the direction of that change is correct and positive.”

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