GDC in firing line

The General Dental Council’s actions this month have caused outrage among the profession

The General Dental Council (GDC) has caused outrage among dental professionals this July with a proposed 64 per cent hike in Annual Retention Fees (ARF), followed by an advert placed in the Telegraph days later, advertising the Dental Complaints Service (DCS). The advert reportedly cost £60,000.

The GDC has said that the increase to the ARF is needed to cover the rising number of complaints against registrants. The proposal which would see the ARF for dentists increase to £945 a year and for DCPs to £128; a 64 per cent and 6.7 per cent increase respectively.

The announcement has since had a lot of backlash on social media, with one Twitter user tweeting “Fewer job prospects, less earning potential, increased retirement age and now higher ARFs” while another said “£945 #GDC ARF is prohibitive for early career dentists who are already struggling with other fees and student debt.”

An e-petition has also been released, asking the government to review the fee increase. At the time of writing, the petition has gained 15,583 signatures.

Mick Armstrong, chair of the British Dental Association’s Principal Executive Committee, said the increase in fees is ‘unacceptable’, especially as the latest Professional Standards Authority (PSA) report on the GDC was highly critical of the regulator.

He said: “The suggestion that the profession pay more to fund a Council that has been shown unable to do its job properly is frankly astonishing. The rise would be unpalatable at the best of times but now it appears that the profession is being asked to foot the bill for failure.”

Dr Armstrong added: “It’s not just huge rise in fees that has left the dental profession aghast, but, when dentists are expected to tolerate poor performance by the very body that is charged with the duty to assess their fitness to practise, we are justifiably outraged.”

The BDA has even called on Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt to initiate an urgent investigation into the competence of the GDC.

Approximately a week later, dental professionals were outraged yet again by the regulator when a full-page colour advert appeared in the Telegraph.

The GDC has denied that the advert cost £60,000, stating in a press release that it cost £5,500.

The Telegraph reportedly cost £60,000. This advert is seen by the profession as the regulator twisting the knife, with one Twitter user saying: “GDC ‘forced’ to raise dentists’ fee to manage complaints but found encouraging dental complaints”, and another saying: “They’re honestly made me feel like chucking the towel in. Even our professional body is against us”.

‘Fewer job prospects, less earning potential, increased retirement age and now higher ARFs’
Report reveals failure in CQC inspector recruitment

Almost 70 per cent of Navajo children have tooth decay

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has hired 154 inspectors who failed basic competency tests, official reports reveal.

Internal documents show inspectors the CQC recruited in 2012 failed “some or all of its recruitment activities” during its “significantly flawed” hiring process. This was at a time when the regulator was under fire following a series of scandals in the NHS and care sector.

The document, which was obtained by the Health Service Journal, says that the CQC may face legal action if they try to get rid of the staff as those employed were unaware of the flawed process. The report reveals that past marks for tests to get a job as an inspector were dropped from 60 per cent in order to fill the posts. It further reveals that 126 of the staff who failed the tests remain in post more than one in ten of its 1,051 inspectors. However, those 126 are not aware of the issue.

The regulator says records which provide any evidence about why the recruits were given the jobs are not subject to a probationary period, regular performance management reviews, one-to-ones, and their work is quality assured.

Unregistered dental hygienist proscribed

A woman has been proscribed by the General Dental Council (GDC) for continuing to practise from the GDC register on 3 August 2011 for failing to pay her Annual Retention Fee. Between 10 June 2012 and 5 February 2014, Ms Loftus worked as a dental hygienist at Tavistock Dental Practice in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, and at Liam G. FitzGerald Associates in Thame, Oxfordshire.

She has been fined £200, and ordered to pay £250 towards the GDC’s legal fees and a £20 victim surcharge.

Research predicts oral cancer aggressiveness

Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine have found a way to predict the aggressiveness of mouth cancer in patients. Published in Clinical Cancer Research, the investigators found a consistent pattern of gene expression associated with tumour spreading in mice. Analysing genetic data from human oral cancer samples, they also found this gene signature in people with aggressive metastatic tumours.

This exposure sometimes produced tumours in the mice that did not spread, but other times resulted in aggressive metastatic tumours, similar to the variety of tumours seen in people.

Tooth development from adult stem cells

Scientists are developing an innovative procedure that would use cells from adult patients to grow full, functioning teeth in situ.

Teeth can be grown from embryonic cells but Professor Paul Sharpe at King’s College London Dental Institute, says a treatment using only adult cells and growth-stimulating chemicals has a much better chance of ever making it to market.

Embryonic cells are surrounded by ethical controversy and could not be collected in the numbers necessary for approved large scale treatment in patients. Adult cells are a more accessible option and, if the patient’s own cells are used, they could also negate the need for a lifetime of immunosuppressant drugs to avoid rejection.

To grow a new tooth requires two types of cell, epithelial cells and mesenchymal stem cells. One of these types of cells must send instructions to the other cell population to begin creating the different cell types and tissues needed in teeth.

The team has already shown that epithelial cells collected from adult patients’ gum tissues during routine dental surgery can respond to instructions from embryonic mesenchymal cells to growth of teeth. The team is now searching for a source of mesenchymal cells from adults that will trigger the same responses.

Wales bans smoking in cars with children

First Minister Carwyn Jones and Health Minister Mark Drakeford have announced that a ban on people smoking in private vehicles when children are present will be introduced in Wales.

In 2011, the First Minister announced the Welsh Government’s intention to mount a campaign to tackle children’s exposure to second-hand smoke in cars. New research shows that although the number of children being exposed to smoking in cars has declined, there is still a “sizeable minority” of young people who are exposed to smoke in private vehicles.

Wales government-backed research by Cardiff University has shown that one in ten children continue to be exposed to smoke in family cars. The research also found that there is public support for the ban; with 84 per cent of people surveyed agreeing that smoking should be banned in cars carrying children.

Dr Graham Moore, who led the study, said: “There is evidence to show high levels of public support for a ban on smoking in cars carrying children. Our evidence points to a need for continued action to make smoking in front of children less socially acceptable, whether in the car or at home.”

Health Minister Mark Drakeford said: “Although the research findings show that progress has been made in reducing children’s exposure to second-hand smoke in cars, we now believe the introduction of regulations to prohibit smoking in private vehicles is needed as the final piece in the jigsaw to eliminate the harm and end persistent inequalities in exposure.”

The government has said that a consultation on the proposal will be launched shortly.
Dentist tries to perform treatment in McDonald’s, struck off

A dentist who attempted to provide dental treatment in McDonald’s has been struck off by the General Dental Council (GDC).

Anca Claudia Macavei, who worked at the Cannon Street Practice, was charged with not carrying out sufficient diagnostic assessments during initial appointments; performing root canal treatment without gloves; and not undertaking sufficient treatment planning for patients; among other charges.

Ms Macavei also attempted to provide dental treatment for a patient in a McDonald’s restaurant and in the hallway outside of a dental practice, and requested that another patient attend a dental appointment in McDonald’s.

The GDC’s Professional Conduct Committee said: “In view of the outstanding concerns that remain, the Committee concluded that you would be unable to practise safely as a dentist without restriction on your practice or at all. It also concluded that public confidence in the dental profession would be undermined if a finding of impairment were not made in the circumstances of this case.”

Ms Macavei is currently lodging a High Court appeal.

NHS could face funding crisis before General Election

The NHS is ‘poorly placed’ to deal with continuing austerity and could experience a funding crisis before the 2015 General Election, new research from Nuffield Trust reveals.

The report, Into the Red?, reveals that until 2013, the NHS was coping well with a squeeze on funding due to increasing demand on the health service and the consequences of public sector austerity since 2010. However, provisional data from the 2013/14 financial year shows that cracks are starting to show due to severe financial pressure.

NHS and Foundation Trusts as a whole were at least £100m in the red in the last financial year, with 66 trusts in deficit in 2013/14. It also found that 19 Clinical Commissioning Groups ended the last financial year in deficit and NHS England projected a £377m overspend on specialised services.

The analysis concludes that reforms to NHS services by adopting new technologies and promoting out-of-hospital care could help put it on a more sustainable financial footing in the future, but expecting this to happen in the next few years and without additional funding is unrealistic.
Dentist gives accident patient new set of teeth

A girl who lost six teeth after a cycling accident has received a brand new set of teeth from a dentist – for free.

Alex Kerr, 20, was hit by a car as she cycled home from work in November 2013. Doctors saved her life but said she would have to go on an NHS waiting list to have her teeth repaired. However, after reading about the accident, Dr Wynand de Jeger from the Brooklands Dental Practice offered to perform the £12,000 worth of dental work for free.

Alex told the Metro: “I was just so self-conscious all the time and sometimes didn’t want to leave the house. I can’t even imagine what it would be like if I couldn’t have these implants done. Me and my boyfriend had just moved into a new flat when I had my accident and now I can finally begin to enjoy it.”

BDA to challenge FD pay cut

The British Dental Association (BDA) will be exploring all legal avenues to challenge the Government’s decision to impose a pay cut on foundation dentists (FDSs) of more than £2,000 from September.

Dental graduates are leaving universities with an average debt of £25,000, and the BDA believes an eight per cent pay cut at the start of their careers ‘exploits the most vulnerable members of the profession’.

The Department of Health says that the pay cut brings dental salaries in line with their medical equivalents. However the BDA argues that medical trainees have the opportunity to earn additional NHS income, meaning they earn on average £40,000.

Chair of the BDA’s Principal Executive Committee, Mick Armstrong, said: “We are both angry and disappointed over the failure to grasp the strength of feeling against these cuts, which frankly many see as an attempt to prey on the most vulnerable members of the profession.”

The BDA’s campaign to oppose the cuts has won support on Twitter, where the BDA is encouraging tweets using the hashtag #BDApay, and on the BDA’s Facebook page. To sign the e-petition, visit http://petition.direct.gov.uk/petitions/48208.

Long-term care improves oral health in adults with special needs

A new study has found that among adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the likelihood of having cavities decreased as the number of years receiving dental care increased.

Researchers at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (TUSDM) reviewed dental records of 107 patients with special needs to determine how selected oral health outcomes changed over a treatment period of approximately ten years.

Cavity rates were found to decline over the treatment period. At the first visit, the rate of cavities was greater than 60 per cent; at subsequent time periods it was lower than 45 per cent. However, gum disease was found to increase over time in patients, although the researchers said this was consistent with the progression of the disease in an ageing adult population.

Senior author John Morgan, associate professor at TUSDM, said: “Our findings suggest that even among patients who receive routine dental care, significant oral health problems remain. The challenge now is to determine how we can find effective solutions to these problems.”

Almost 26,000 children hospitalised for tooth decay

Tooth decay is the most common reason children are admitted to hospital, research shows.

The latest figures from the Health and Social Care Information Centre found that the number of hospital admissions for five to nine-year-olds with dental problems was 25,812 in 2013/14. This is up by more than 5,000 from 2010/11, when the figure was 22,574.

The figures also showed that in 2013-14, almost 500 children aged five to nine were hospitalised each week due to tooth decay.

Kathryn Harley, former dean of the faculty of dental surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons, told the Sunday Times: “We have children who require all 20 of their baby teeth to be extracted. It beggars belief that their diets could produce such a drastic effect.”

These figures follow last month’s (June 2014) ITV documentary The Dentists, which highlighted the prevalence of tooth decay in children. The programme focused on children with high levels of decay being admitted to the University Dental Hospital of Manchester for multiple extractions, with one four-year-old’s baby teeth being almost all rotten.

Claire Stevens, Consultant in Paediatric Dentistry at the University Dental Hospital of Manchester, and spokesperson for the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry, said at the time: “If these children had seen a paediatric dentist earlier, it might have been possible to save their teeth, instead of removing them and potentially triggering dental anxieties for life.

“In the 21st century, it’s entirely unacceptable that children in the UK are having to undergo a general anaesthetic, losing their teeth at a young age due to a disease which is entirely preventable.”

‘Fake’ ecstasy pills made from dental anaesthetic

Illegal drug suppliers are bulking out ecstasy pills with a dental anaesthetic, with experts warning that users are risking their lives by taking these ‘fake’ pills.

According to the Evening Times, the pills contain only a fraction of ecstasy. They are bulked out with benzocaine, a legal dental anaesthetic which is easily available for sale on the internet.

A source told the paper: “Dealers use benzocaine to make money. They don’t care what mixing agents they use, or how dangerous they are, as long as they look like drugs and can create a similar effect. You could be putting anything into your body. Although benzocaine is legal, it is an extremely dangerous drug, if not used properly.”

A spokeswoman from the British Dental Association added: “As a local anaesthetic, benzocaine will make parts of the body numb which could result in accidental injury.

“An overdose of benzocaine can cause life-threatening side effects such as uneven heartbeats, seizures, coma, slowed breathing, or respiratory failure, where breathing stops.”