



# Health Committee

## Select Committee Press Notice

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**2 July 2008**

## **NEW CONTRACT FAILING TO IMPROVE DENTAL SERVICES, SAY MPS**

A Health Committee report published today warns that the Department of Health is so far failing to improve dental services, as assessed by its own criteria for success.

Despite assertions from the Chief Dental Officer (CDO) that the situation has stabilised and improvements will soon be seen, access to dentistry remains uneven across the country and indications are that the new arrangements have failed so far to improve patient access overall.

The report makes a number of recommendations:

- improve PCT commissioning by developing in-house skills and by drawing on advice from dental public health specialists
- base future Primary Care Trust (PCT) dental funding on a local needs assessment, not on a historic basis
- review the Units of Dental Activity (UDA) system so dentists are rewarded for providing appropriate treatment
- consider introducing a QOF-style reward system for dentists who improve the dental health of their patients
- reinstate patient registration to improve dentist-patient relationship
- ensure changes to the system are piloted and tested rigorously

The Committee found it extraordinary that the new remuneration system for dentists, based on UDAs, was not piloted or tested before it was introduced in 2006. Too many PCTs have set unrealistic UDA targets and a more flexible approach must be adopted.

The CDO appeared to argue that if PCTs and dentists acted more flexibly and used common sense and goodwill, the new arrangements would work. The Committee saw little evidence that this will happen.

The number of complex treatments involving laboratory work fell by 50% during the first year of the contract. The reason for the decline has not been satisfactorily explained and the report raises concerns that some patients do not receive the quality of care they need within the NHS. The Department must publish an explanation for this trend and commission research into the effect of this decline within the NHS system and its impact on oral health.

Many dentists fear an exodus from the General Dental Service in 2009 once guaranteed income ends. The Department claims no such exodus will occur. The Committee urges the Department to monitor closely the career plans of NHS dentists.

The report welcomes the Department's decision to analyse how dental services might develop over the next five years. The Committee calls on the Department to address the extent to which NHS dentistry should offer the growing number of treatments which do not address clinical ill-health but are concerned with improving the quality of life.

The Chairman of the Health Committee, Kevin Barron MP, said:

"It is disappointing that so far the new dental contract has failed to improve the patient's experience of dental services. While we readily accept that in some areas of the country provision of NHS dentistry is good, overall provision is patchy. Fewer patients are visiting an NHS dentist than before the contracts were introduced in April 2006, we heard little evidence that preventive care has increased, and patients seem less likely to receive complex treatments they might require within the NHS.

"The Department did not test through a pilot the new remuneration system and we were astonished that in such a crucial area of reform the Department chose not to undertake rigorous testing prior to its introduction.

"It is vital that PCTs take a lead role in commissioning – we agree that this is a positive move – but PCTs must prove they are up to the challenge and Strategic Health Authorities must place greater importance on their role in managing PCTs' performance."

Ends.

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#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

In April 2006 the Department reformed the GDS making a number of far-reaching changes: Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) were given the power to commission dental services; the patient charging system was simplified; and under the terms of a new dental contract, dentists were remunerated according to the number of Units of Dental Activity (UDA) completed. The Department issued a number of criteria for success: patient experience; clinical quality; NHS commissioning and improving dentists' working lives.

Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) is a scheme through which GPs are financially rewarded for meeting a range of quantitative and qualitative measures.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION:**

The Membership of the Committee is as follows: Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP (Chairman) [L], Charlotte Atkins MP [L], Mr Peter Bone MP [C], Jim Dowd MP [L], Sandra Gidley MP [LD], Stephen Hesford MP [L], Dr Doug Naysmith MP [L], Mr Lee Scott MP [C], Dr Howard Stoate MP [L], Mr Robert Syms MP [C], Dr Richard Taylor MP [IND].

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