



Ms Diane Dodds MLA  
Minister  
Department for the Economy  
Netherleigh House  
Massey Avenue  
Belfast  
BT4 2JP

8<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Re. Emergency financial plight of mixed/private dental practices**

Dear Minister

On two previous occasions (24<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> April) we have written to you to warn of the potentially grave financial situation facing private oriented dental practices in Northern Ireland -which includes a large number of mixed NHS/Private practices and a small number of solely private practices - in the ongoing absence of UK Government or NI Executive support.

Three months on, just as BDA survey findings had predicted, that situation has become severe.

On Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June, a communication issued by the Acting Chief Dental Officer to all General Dental Practitioners with accompanying guidance stated:

*'As such, I am asking for a single approach to the recovery of dental services. I believe that the reasons for the restrictions placed on the provision of dental care apply equally whether the service is Health Service or private, and that all dentists will understand the rationale for a single approach as we cautiously move out of the peak transmission period.'*

*'The Department of Health and the HSCB will work with the RQIA to ensure that both private and Health Service dental care is regulated in a consistent and proportionate way against the published guidance to assure the safety of patient care and the dental team during the pandemic period'.*

British Dental Association  
The Mount, 2 Woodstock Link, Belfast BT6 8DD  
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While your previous letter stated that Dental services were included amongst those businesses that could continue to trade under The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, while buildings may be allowed to open, the position outlined above differs materially in terms of what actual dental services can be carried out for the foreseeable future.

According to a BDA survey responded to at the start of this pandemic, 76% of dental practices with low or no NHS commitment (0-25% NHS) said they would face imminent difficulties in the next three months. Those three months have now passed; and for heavily mixed and predominantly private practices, the scenario of being subject to a gradual phased return of dentistry and being severely curtailed in what dental care can be provided/income generated -without any meaningful support from government -makes their situation desperate, and grossly unfair. This is the classic example of falling between two stools.

I stress again -the government -Westminster and the NI Executive -has not discharged its duties to dental practices by virtue of putting in place the Financial Support Scheme to compensate against lost Health Service earnings alone; if private practices are to be curtailed in the same way as General Dental Services, and the merits of seeing dental services recovering in a uniform way are to be realised, then the NI Executive must intervene, and urgently provide dental practices who have been unable to avail of wider government supports a package that compensates them for enforced practicing restrictions.

Many mixed/private oriented dental practice businesses are now at the point of collapse without immediate financial intervention from the NI Executive.

Finally, for all those practices who do not survive there will be a corresponding increase in demand on the GDS budget as patients who previously chose to access their treatment privately can no longer do so. Moreover, there will be thousands of NHS patients who will lose access to NHS dentistry where practices close. These represent coherent public finance arguments to invest public funds now to support those practices to survive, and avoid long term pressures and access issues in future.

The dental profession has demonstrated outstanding leadership during the COVID pandemic to support the wider NHS and public health -they have donated PPE to care homes and community pharmacies; they have supplied oxygen cylinders to hospitals; worked for nothing in urgent dental care centres (remuneration being linked with NHS FSS earnings); kept their practices manned seven days a week to triage their own patients and extending to unregistered patients for no extra reward. We appeal to the Executive to recognise this and support mixed /private oriented practices.

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We wish to request an urgent meeting with you to discuss these matters further.  
Grateful if your office will liaise with the BDA NI Director Tristen Kelso accordingly.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Graham'.

Richard Graham

Chair, NI Dental Practice Committee

Cc: Rt. Hon Arlene Foster MLA, First Minister & Ms Michelle O'Neill MLA, deputy  
First Minister

Cc: Mr Conor Murphy MLA, Minister of Finance

Cc: Mr Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health

Cc: Michael Donaldson, Acting Chief Dental Officer

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