By email

10 July 2020

Dear Ms Churchill

NHS general dental practice

I am writing to you on behalf of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee to express our ongoing deep frustration over the lack of progress in confirming the contractual arrangements for general dental practice during the pandemic.

We understand of course that these are exceptional times and that NHS England is facing an enormous challenge in managing health services during the pandemic whilst seeking to ensure that contractual arrangements remain fit for purpose. However, we are now approaching four months since NHS England’s letter of preparedness for dentistry dated 25th March set out the intended approach to contractual arrangements for the lockdown period.

One of the key aspects of that letter was an indication that there would be ‘an agreed and fair reduction for any variable costs associated with service delivery (e.g. in recognition of reduced consumable costs)’. Dentists need to know this abatement figure in order to understand their income. Despite regular discussion between NHS England and the BDA over past months, that figure is yet to be confirmed. There have been occasions when we understood a position to be confirmed only for further internal NHS England delay and procrastination.

The situation is massively frustrating and, in our view, disrespectful towards general dental practice. NHS England ought to be embarrassed at the time taken to resolve this matter.
As you know, we moved into a new phase of care from 8th June with practices beginning to treat patients on a face-to-face basis. This is a welcome development but means further discussion around the appropriate NHS contractual arrangements for this current period. Again, we do not know yet what those arrangements will be. NHS dentistry is operating in an environment where it doesn’t have a clear picture of the payment system within which patient care is being provided.

I am sure that you will appreciate that this lack of certainty is destabilising for practices during a period when providing dentistry is already difficult enough.

The BDA is keen to contribute positively as dentistry emerges from the pandemic but there are some basic contractual issues that are now long outstanding. This is unacceptable. We ask you to intervene to ensure that NHS dentistry can move ahead and do what it does best in continuing to provide excellent patient care.

Yours sincerely

Dave Cottam
Chair, GDPC

cc Matt Neligan, Director of Primary Care and System Transformation, NHS England