

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
sent by email

4 January 2021

Dear Secretary of State

NHS activity targets during Covid restrictions

I am writing to you following the announcement of the new lockdown arrangements for England.

As you will know activity measures were imposed on NHS dental practices from 1 January 2021 for the current quarter. We have refused to sign up to these measures which in our view, even ahead of tonight's news, represented a threat both to the sustainability of NHS services and to patient care.

In light of this evening's announcement, we are now asking you to abandon these targets with immediate effect. Under current arrangements, practices will face steep financial penalties if they fail to hit 45% of their pre-pandemic NHS activity targets from 1 January – 1 April 2021. You will no doubt echo our view that while practices remain open and safe, a new lockdown will have a major impact on patients' willingness to seek care, routine or otherwise.

Patient non-attendance will become commonplace, as will dentists and their teams being unable to work due to infection or self-isolation. It cannot be argued with any credibility that these situations represent 'exceptional circumstances', when all practices are now facing these conditions as the norm.

During our negotiations with NHS England, we made clear these targets would force practices to prioritise routine check-ups for the 'worried-well' over a time-consuming urgent backlog in order to hit arbitrary activity measures. That problem remains, but now these unrealistic targets will be harder to achieve than ever.

On a related note we are conscious that failure to provide clarity on the key worker status of dental team members means we are already receiving reports from dentists and staff unable to secure childcare. I hope your team will rectify this at speed.

We have signalled our desire to work constructively with your team to find a safe and sustainable basis to improve access to services for this quarter, and for the difficult months ahead. That remains our intention. As it stands, these targets were already set to push many NHS practices to the brink. Now, without urgent change, dental services across this country face decimation, risking patient care for years to come.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Dave Cottam
Chair, General Dental Practice Committee
British Dental Association

cc: Jo Churchill MP, DHSC; Sara Hurley, NHSE; Jonathan Ashworth MP; Alex Norris MP.