



Mr Humza Yousaf MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

By email

3 September 2021

Dear Cabinet Secretary

On behalf of the Scottish Dental Practice Committee, I would like to raise several concerns regarding the launch of free NHS dental care for 18-25 year-olds on 24 August.

Timing of the announcement

We acknowledge that the change had previously been signalled for late August but issuing a PCA to NHS Boards on Friday 20 August meant that, in effect, practices would not have been formally informed of the new arrangements until Monday 23 August – the day before the change came into effect – or perhaps later. This short notice meant that many practices would have been unable to deliver the necessary staff training for the new arrangements, and the opportunity to introduce appropriate revisions to practice management systems. We urge the Scottish Government to work with the profession to allow practices sufficient time to prepare for any future changes.

Public messaging

At our meeting with you in early June, we advised that the rollout of free dentistry would inevitably increase patient expectations and heap more pressure on dental teams who are already struggling to address a colossal backlog of unmet dental care need. Colleagues have reported a substantial increase in enquiries about free dental care since 24 August, and hard-pressed dental teams are bearing the brunt of patients' frustrations. We are aware that the Scottish Government has posted information for patients on its Twitter account and on scottishdental.org but the public are unlikely to monitor these sites. We therefore again call on the Scottish Government to communicate clearly to patients that the removal of dental charges for young adults does not signal a return to "business as usual" and that practices will continue to prioritise urgent cases for some considerable time.

Impact on practice administration

In the Business Regulatory Impact Assessment for the new policy, it states (section 15):

"Savings will likely be made by dental practices, as their administration costs should decrease under the new policy."

Can you please advise what evidence the Scottish Government has for this statement, as colleagues have advised that the opposite is likely to be the case? Practice staff will have to


deal with a higher volume of enquiries from patients, many of whom will be unregistered. Also, young adults are often the most difficult to offer appointments to as they work part time and attend college, or university, or are in apprenticeships so cannot get off to attend. Chasing up non-attenders is time consuming for receptionists, and deregistering some of these patients for consistent poor attendance also takes time. Furthermore, staff costs are a fixed overhead so there is little scope to make savings in this area.

On more general matters, we welcome the additional £7.5 million for electric motors and speed increasing 'red band' hand pieces, and we look forward to receiving further details of this funding soon.

Finally, we previously stressed the need for a more sustainable funding model to replace the current "emergency" arrangements that were introduced at short notice at the start of the pandemic. We note in your letter of 20 August that new IPC guidance is expected at the end of September. Presumably this will form the basis for new funding arrangements along with minimum practice activity levels? In your previous letter to the profession (15 June), you stated that the Scottish Government would discuss these new arrangements with BDA Scotland during the summer, but no discussions have yet taken place. We look forward to meaningful negotiations with Scottish Government in the coming weeks.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely



David McColl
Chair, Scottish Dental Practice Committee

CC. Mr Tom Ferris
Chief Dental Officer