Dear Katrina, David and Russell,

Thank you for your comments and introductions. I look forward to working with you in my new role.

The all-Wales Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for dentistry during the COVID-19 pandemic is based on the following current UK infection control and prevention (IPC) guidance, latest evidence and Welsh Government advice:


The SOP has been under constant review throughout the pandemic, with updates in accordance with evidence, guidance and transmission.

While there has been evidence of transmission between staff members in practices, there is no evidence of COVID-19 transmission to or from patients. This is likely to be as a result of the infection control measures we have in place which have ensured patients have received safe dental care throughout the pandemic. It is recognised the infection case rate has declined and is low at the present time. Furthermore, vaccination uptake has been good in Wales and the risks for patients and staff who are vaccinated will be reduced. However, there are still cases of COVID-19 in the population and there are currently concerns about new variants.
Amendments are being made to the latest version of the SOP within the bounds of the IPC and Welsh Government guidance to support use of the low risk pathways during periods of very low transmission, and this will address some of the points that you have made in your correspondence. The revised SOP is due for release shortly.

The additional funding of £450,000 from the Welsh Government to support improved ventilation in dental practices has been welcomed by the profession and in many cases Health Boards have provided additional match-funding to ensure improvements have been made where needed.

Health Education and Improvement Wales are considering the commissioning of training numbers, training and education packages for health care professionals to help develop the workforce, and considering whether there are more effective workforce models to deliver services which could improve dentists’ workloads and make practices more sustainable. As part of our dental reform programme we will be addressing workforce issues including a broad gap analysis of the dental workforce needs against the seven themes in the NHS workforce strategy. This will then allow for strategic framing of where action and work is needed. Dental nurse training, and hygiene and therapy training, will all be factored in along with career pathways and training for dentists. This allows us to develop a dental workforce strategy that goes beyond dental reform and ensuring the workforce is fit for the future.

Skill-mix can play a significant role in the provision of NHS dental care and this is a key component of our reform programme. Expanding the number of Dental Care Professionals who can deliver care and preventive interventions directly to patients is also a core part of change. The need to expand the use of Dental Care Professionals has been understood for some time however the existing dental contract stifles the use of skill mix in dentistry. The current system change and reform will align dentistry with the primary care model and allow expansion in the use of the whole team in care delivery; improving access and prevention.

Welsh Government, working with Bangor University, have also established an all-Wales Faculty of Dental Care Professionals which is working with education colleges and training providers to set clear educational frameworks and monitor the quality of training. It will develop research capability, leadership and enhance the skills of Dental Care Professionals to help fulfil their potential.

Whilst it has been necessary to suspend the Designed to Smile (D2S) national oral health improvement programme during the pandemic, we have continued with the delivery of home packs which also include oral health advice on the prevention of tooth decay, twice a year. The D2S team recently wrote to all participating schools and nurseries to say we hope to be in a position to re-start their tooth-brushing schemes in the Autumn 2021 term. This will be kept under review, depending on the alert level in Wales and prevalence of Covid-19 within local communities.

We have worked with Health Boards to ensure that as part of the recovery of services, measures are included to ensure dental practices see new patients. If dental treatment is urgent or the patient is in pain there is provision in place to provide care quickly. However, there will be a delay for new patients looking for routine care.

The return of services will continue to be gradual. The approach we are taking proposes to deliver dental services for those most in need, with the numbers being treated increasing as the Covid-19 risk reduces. We need dental practices to continue to follow strict infection control measures, including social distancing, to protect practice staff, patients and the wider community.
Yours sincerely,

Eluned Morgan AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services