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NHS Dental Teams
Sent by email

21 October 2021

I wanted to write to you personally to thank you for all your efforts during such a challenging period. We are still in the midst of a global pandemic, however it is vital we work together to help recover dental services and I wanted to set out the measures that the Scottish Government plans to deliver in connection with the recovery of NHS dental services in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has invested an additional £50m in emergency support payments to protect the sector from the worst financial effects of the pandemic, including substantial provision of PPE. On this basis my focus is recovering and securing the stability of the sector utilising the pre-pandemic payment framework, thereafter, I am keen to work collaboratively with you in relation to any long-term reform programme.

I believe that sustaining the pre-pandemic blended payments system is the only practical way to recover the sector and clear the patient care backlog. Furthermore, I do not believe it would be prudent to introduce substantial reform in the midst of an uncertain period for the dental sector. I take the view that recovering services requires you to apply a business model that operates within the parameters of a pre-existing payment framework. I strongly believe this system has the added benefit of certainty as it is based on a pre-pandemic structure that is understood by all practitioners. I do not believe there is any other practical or value for money alternative.

The Scottish Government, therefore, intends to amend the current fee structure to support the recovery of patient facing NHS services and tackle the backlog in routine care that has been deferred because of the measures in place for the safe practice of dentistry throughout the pandemic. These measures will have a particular focus on children, including the overarching aim of addressing oral health inequalities.

In summary my intention is to make the following changes:

- The removal of the 1(a) examination fee code, resting instead on the extensive examination as the main claimable item when the patient attends for an examination. In future the basis for all examinations would be a 1(b) fee code, including an extensive examination, with appropriate advice and charting.

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- In view of the particular needs for child dentistry, a 1(b) fee code will now also be claimable for children; similarly the adult fee for radiographs will now be claimable for children.
- The removal of the annual Childsmile fee codes and replacing these with a single claimable fee for the provision of Childsmile care for all children up to and including 17 years of age. We also intend to extend the fluoride varnish claim for all children up to and including 12 years of age.

The proposed timeline for introduction of these changes is from 1 February 2022, to allow a period of bedding in before the top-up financial support measures are withdrawn from 1 April 2022. I think this is fair and transparent approach to funding and support and is in line with the withdrawal of similar arrangements across government. These substantial changes alongside, anticipated IPC guidance will hopefully, allow NHS dental teams to work together to clear the care backlog while building back the sector and address the significant challenges posed by the effects of the pandemic period.

I understand that the wider reform programme for NHS dentistry is something that will need to be addressed, however, I am clear that further significant changes must be sequenced correctly and we are committed to working with the entire dental sector to support a consultative and practicable timetable for reform. In the broader context of recovery and reform there is a clear need to review dental allowance payment structures and to support patient centred care through the delivery of preventive care in NHS dentistry, working up the proposals that were well advanced before the pandemic in the New Model of Care. I see the opportunity for further development and sectoral involvement, including consultation, around these priorities during 2022/23.

I look forward to working with you through the recovery of the sector, improving patient access to services and I am sure that you will recognise that the journey that the sector is about to embark on is of critical importance to long term NHS dental services in Scotland.

Kind regards



HUMZA YOUSAF

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