



To: Ms Liz Kimmins MLA (Chair)
c/o Mr Keith McBride
Clerk, NI Assembly Health Committee
Room 410 Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BT4 3XX

Sent via email

19th September 2024

Re. DoH evidence session on General Dental Services -3rd October

Dear Liz

Following our oral evidence to the committee in June, and ahead of the scheduled DoH session on General Dental Services, our NI Dental Practice Committee wishes to helpfully offer some pointers where scrutiny on progress is considered essential.

Ensuring real and substantive action towards a new fit-for-purpose GDS contract is key at a time when Health Service dentistry is rapidly shrinking, and on a worrying downward trajectory.

Indeed, since we last met, the latest DDRB Report confirms that the proportion of time spent on NHS work by associate dentists between 2019-20 and 2022-23 has fallen most rapidly in Northern Ireland compared to the other UK nations. On average, the failing GDS contract has resulted in a reduction of 13% to 64.7% of time spent on NHS work, compared with falls of 9% in Scotland, 4% in Wales and 3% in England.

In the same time period, practice principals in Northern Ireland have reduced their NHS time commitment by an average 8% points to 58.1%¹.

Practitioners continue to ask: ***What is the plan for Health Service dentistry?***

We would encourage committee scrutiny in the following areas:

- DoH plans/timeline for a new GDS Contract
- Patient de-registration figures/trend, particularly since March 24
- Dental Amalgam: how will DoH fulfil conditions of derogation to support phase-down, including reviewing the Northern Ireland Plan to Phase Down the use of Dental Amalgam², and crucially, make the necessary progress on:

¹ CP 1118 – Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration – Fifty-Second Report 2024 (publishing.service.gov.uk), 5.22-5.23

² <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/dental-amalgam-plan.pdf>

- improving population oral health/investing in Prevention (including funding & implementing Oral Health Improvement Plans);
- Dental service reform (i.e. bringing forward a new GDS Contract & workforce growth in Community and Hospital Dental Services);
- Supporting alternative materials & techniques
- Dental Workforce Planning -when will we see the recommendations of the 2018 Review published belatedly in 2023, taken forward?
- Scotland dental payment reform -a delaying tactic, or is DoH serious about application to Northern Ireland? When?
- £9.2m Dental Access Scheme:
 - why the failure to engage with BDA in advance?
 - Has the Dental Access Scheme succeeded in recruiting the x60 practices hoped for, or has there been a significant shortfall in interest?
 - What medium to long-term plans to stabilise General Dental Services? DoH plans for after the temporary 30% fee enhancement for fillings, extractions and root canal treatments ends at the end of this financial year, including fully utilising all GDS underspend?

The situation before us is well documented in this year's Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body (DDRB) 52nd Report:

5.139 *It is clear to us that the current contractual arrangements are not enabling NHS dentistry to be sustained or to grow, partly because recently qualified dentists are increasingly choosing to work outside the NHS. We have repeatedly highlighted this as an area of concern and no successful attempt has been made to address the contractual framework. Despite an understanding of these issues, policies to address them have been piecemeal. We strongly recommend that governments embark on a programme of modernisation and contractual reform, starting from the position of what they want the provision of NHS dentistry to be.*

6.34...*While the under-delivery of NHS dentistry across all four nations is a well-recognised concern, a critical step in resolving this is broader contract reform.*

Dental payment reform, and bringing forward a new, co-produced fit-for-purpose GDS Contract is critical.

We thank the committee for its continued interest in Health Service dentistry matters.

Yours sincerely



Tristen Kelso

Northern Ireland Director