

Tuesday, 14 July 2020

To: The Rt. Hon Arlene Foster MLA, First Minister & Michelle O'Neill, Deputy First Minister  
GD36 Stormont Castle  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
BT4 3TT

## **A plea to the Northern Ireland Executive on behalf of mixed/private-oriented and NHS dental practices**

Dear First Minister & deputy First Minister

You will be aware that COVID-19 has had a profound impact on dentists and dental practices in their ability to carry out dental treatments, and therefore, to generate revenue. The financial impact is of an unparalleled scale, and unlike other sectors, the prospect of significant disruption to the volume and type of dentistry that can be carried out looks set to be a feature for the foreseeable future.

The impact on dental earnings is such that revenue is not even coming close to covering outgoings. We are looking at a failure of dental businesses, and associated job losses on a Northern Ireland-wide scale.

Regrettably, despite repeated efforts to highlight the severe financial plight facing mixed/private-oriented dental practices in particular - to the Economy Minister, and also having raised these issues directly with the Health Minister - there has been no additional help forthcoming from those Government Departments to address loss of private earnings. Since March, we have written three times to the Economy Minister, and engaged with the Economy Committee. The response from the Department is wholly deficient, and fails to recognise the mixed economy of dental practices; and that dental practices activities and ability to trade are severely restricted despite being technically open. In short, the response has been wholly unsatisfactory.

**Mixed /private-oriented practitioners who have worked to build up successful dental businesses, are facing a stress on their finances that they are increasingly unable to meet. Personally, many of these dentists are at their wits end. They need help, and they need it urgently from the Executive.**

Dentists whose revenue is derived mainly from National Health Service /GDS dentistry have received a degree of support through the continuation of Health Service earnings under the Financial Support Scheme. However, there is simply no justification to continue to apply an abatement of 20% for variable costs not incurred for July and August at a time when practice

British Dental Association

The Mount, 2 Woodstock Link, Belfast BT6 8DD  
02890 735 856 enquiries@bda.org bda.org

Tuesday, 14 July 2020

costs have sky rocketed due to Level II PPE costs, and a huge reduction in efficiencies. Health Service practices face the prospect of being permitted to carry out AGPs from 20 July, while not having any access to a central supply of Level II PPE to enable them to do so. In many cases, the cost of level II PPE would exceed the (pre-COVID) fee GDPs would receive for carrying out the treatment.

In England, no abatement will be applied from 8 June onwards, which is the date practices began to provide face-to-face patient care. We believe the same logic should be applied here in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the Scottish Government has found an additional £2.75m/month or £33m annually on top of the entire GDS budget to support NHS dental practitioners in response to the additional costs dental practices are facing -and on top of supplying PPE.

It is this supportive approach we believe must come out of discussions that are to begin between DOH, HSCB and BDA over the coming weeks in relation to the future GDS remuneration model that will apply from September until the remainder of the financial year. Any attempt to try to curtail future financial supports in these circumstances to a pre-COVID GDS budget, as previously indicated by DoH officials, is wholly unrealistic, absolutely oblivious to the financial realities faced by practices, and would be entirely reckless so far as safeguarding the future viability of Health Service dentistry in Northern Ireland. The major oversight so far in Executive support to date is that the less Health Service oriented a practice is, the lower the support that they have received. Unless rectified urgently, this will lead to the imminent closure of mixed/private-oriented practices, and with it, hundreds of thousands of children and elderly registered patients will be left without a dental practice.

The fragmented approach to date by individual departments here simply does not address the reality that dental practices are hybrid/mixed businesses with varying degrees of NHS and private revenue streams. Moreover, in recent years, it has been private dental revenue that has subsidised increasingly unsustainable GDS remuneration model.

It is BDA's absolute commitment to do everything possible to fight for the sustainability of all dental practices going forward. That is why we are not prepared to accept the dismissal from the Minister for the Economy in relation to private dentistry.

British Dental Association

The Mount, 2 Woodstock Link, Belfast BT6 8DD  
02890 735 856 enquiries@bda.org bda.org

Tuesday, 14 July 2020

Our urgent plea to the NI Executive on behalf of dentistry in Northern Ireland is as follows:

- 1. Establish a bespoke support package to mitigate against disruption to private dental earnings, including full rates relief for all mixed/private-oriented practices for 2020/21**
- 2. Provide additional funds on top of the GDS budget in recognition of significantly increased costs, to keep Health Service dentistry viable throughout the disruption caused by COVID, with no abatement to be applied from 8 June on**

Only by safeguarding the full mix of dental practices and both their NHS and Private revenue streams can dentistry survive this crisis.

We urge the Executive to acknowledge the emergency that exists within dentistry, and to instruct officials to work with the profession urgently to mitigate this.

We would request an urgent reply.

Yours sincerely



Richard Graham  
Chair, Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee

**Cc:** Mrs Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for the Economy; Mr Robin Swann MLA, Minister for Health; Mr Conor Murphy MLA, Minister of Finance; Committee for the Executive Office; Economy Committee; Health Committee; Finance Committee; MLAs; Michael Donaldson, Acting CDO; Paul Montgomery, DoH