

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
sent by email

16 November 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Capital funding for dental services

I am writing to you concerning the ongoing challenges facing dental services, and the knock-on effect this is having on the patients who need our care.

Dentists are continuing to operate at a fraction of their former capacity. 'Fallow time' – the gap between procedures designed to reduce the risk of viral transmission, and mandated in guidance since the first lockdown – remains the single biggest limiting factor to restoring access to dentistry to anything resembling pre-pandemic levels. This is a problem across both NHS and privately funded dentistry.

Recent changes to Standard Operating Procedures to help practices reduce fallow time are welcome. However, if we are to translate new guidance into an actual boost in patient numbers, we need your help.

Reductions in fallow time are contingent on dentists securing a level of air change per hour (ACH) within their surgeries that in many cases is impossible without new mechanical ventilation.

The problem is twofold. Based on a recent survey, a majority of practices in England simply do not hold data on their air change levels. Meanwhile, most practices also lack the means to invest in the ventilation equipment required to expand capacity. A typical high street practice therefore faces not only a steep bill for ventilation surveys to establish compliance, but also for the cost of equipment and other works, which on the basis of industry advice is estimated to start at £10,000.

In recent years neither NHS England nor the Department of Health and Social Care have extended any capital funding to dental practices. However, these are unprecedented times: new guidance requires a new approach, both to establish the levels of need, and to get systems in place that could have a transformative effect on capacity across dentistry.

An increase in patient throughput would also begin to increase government revenue via patient contributions, to the point where we believe that government capital investment in ventilation would more than pay for itself.

Covid-19 restrictions on patient throughput, set by government, are placing significant limits on the number of patients we can treat for the foreseeable future. Your support could help bring tens of millions of patients back through our doors to get the care they need.

Colleagues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have also raised this matter directly with devolved administrations. I look forward to hearing from you soon and would be happy to discuss these issues with you.

Yours sincerely,



Eddie Crouch
Chair, British Dental Association
cc: Jo Churchill MP, DHSC; Sara Hurley, NHSE; Sandra White, PHE.