

NFWI

Annual Meeting Briefing Notes

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Dental Health Matters



Dental Health Matters

There is a chronic shortage of NHS Dentists and people are suffering health issues as a result. The NFWI calls on the Government to increase investment in the training and retention of dentists and to review the current inadequate NHS contracts in order to ensure everyone can access an NHS dentist wherever they live.

Proposer's position

The proposer is concerned about the shortage of NHS dentists. The proposer wants the Government to take action by reviewing the NHS contracts and to provide more places for people to train as dentists.

The scale of the problem

The NHS dental contract, introduced in 2006, requires dentists to complete a set number of units of dental activity (UDAs) each year that form the basis for remuneration by the NHS. UDAs are a measure of the amount of work done during dental treatment. These rates do not relate to the number of patients, patient need, geography or levels of deprivation.

The number of dental surgeries offering NHS treatment fell from 9,661 in 2014-2015 to 8,408 in 2019-2020. According to the General Dental Council, there has been an increase in dentist registration numbers from 34,700 in 2011 to 43,292 in 2021.

In 2021, Health Education England published a four-year plan to develop a workforce that can support patient and population needs within the NHS and reform dental education and training with a focus on flexible working, skills development and widening access and participation.

In Wales, the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee published a report in February 2023 after undertaking an inquiry into dentistry to see whether the Welsh Government is doing enough to bridge the gap in oral health inequalities and rebuild dentistry in Wales following the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of rising costs of living.

The current situation

In August 2022, BBC research in partnership with the British Dental Association found that 91% of dental practices in England could not take on new adult NHS patients and 79% could not accept new child NHS patients.

An increasing number of dentists are investing their future in the private sector. In 2023, a British Dental Association survey found that 43% of dentists reported an intention to go private and 74% indicated an intention to reduce or further reduce their NHS work.

In July 2022, some initial reforms were announced to the dental contract namely a minimum UDA value, a higher reward for treating 3 or more teeth and a new payment rate for complex treatment. The British Dental Association is not content with the reforms. They believe that the UDA system is fundamentally flawed and that NHS dentistry is facing a "genuine crisis" of access.

The NHS Long-term Workforce plan published in June 2023 has a commitment to expand dentistry training places by 40% to 1,100 places by 2031/32. To support this, NHS England plans to expand places by 24% by 2028/29.

A report by the Health and Social Care Committee has described the current dental contract as 'not fit for purpose' and called on the government to reform dental contracts so that everyone who needs an NHS dentist can access one. It calls for a move away from the

current system of UDAs in favour of a 'weighted capitation' based system which provides financial incentives for seeing new patients and those with greater dental need.

In February 2024, the UK Government published its NHS Dental Recovery Plan. It aims to create more than 2.5 million additional NHS appointments, including 1.5 million additional treatments, in England over the next 12 months with a focus on providing access to those who have not seen a dentist in the past 2 years. A new patient premium will be provided to support dentists who take on new patients, a cash incentive will be offered to encourage dentists to work in areas that are underserved, and a dental van service will be introduced in targeted rural and coastal communities.

The British Dental Association does not believe that the Dental Recovery Plan goes far enough and has noted that it lacks detail. It has stated that the £200 million announced to implement the Plan will not make a difference in addressing workforce retention and improving access to dental care.

Analysis undertaken by the BDA indicates unmet need for dentistry in 2023 stood at over 12 million people, up a million on 2022 figures, and now well over one in four of England's adult population.

Furthermore, an article published in October 2023 by The Guardian reported that record numbers of patients are complaining to the NHS Ombudsman about poor care, exorbitant fees and difficulty getting treatment from NHS dental services in England.

In Wales, the crisis of NHS dentistry is similar, however, before the Covid-19 pandemic the Welsh Government introduced what they called 'contract reform'. However local dental committees have also approached the Welsh government to highlight a system that isn't working and to argue that a better one needs to be found.

Points to consider

- The WI could add value to this issue by calling for a review into NHS contracts and an increase in the provision of places for people to train as dentists as well as highlighting a growing issue with regard to access to affordable dental care.
- The government has recently published its NHS Dental Recovery Plan with the aim of addressing the difficulties faced by NHS dental services. The British Dental Association and the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee have noted their disappointment that the Plan does not include a reform of the NHS dental contract.
- The WI has four past mandates related to dental health (1926, 1930, 1960 and 1996).

How could the WI work on this issue if it was passed?

A full campaign would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account developments since then. To help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on this issue.

At local and regional levels, WIs and federations can work with local dental practices to call on the government to honour pledges in the NHS Long-term Workforce plan. WIs and federations could also engage with their local Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to find out what steps are being taken to improve access to dentistry in their area.

WIs could learn more about the issue and hold educational events to highlight the growing issue with regard to access to affordable dental care.

Nationally, the NFWI could form partnerships with expert organisations to call for a review into NHS contracts and an increase in the provision of places for people to train as dentists.

Further information

Health Watch UK

healthwatch.co.uk/

British Dental Association

bda.org/

House of Commons- Research Briefing: NHS Dentistry in England

commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9597/

Video content

BBC News: NHS Dentistry Access in the UK

bda.org/news-and-opinion/blog/nhs-dentistry-have-we-reached-the-point-of-no-return/

BBC News: NHS Dentists in Wales

bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64761201

Public Affairs Department Contacts

If you have any questions about the resolutions or the resolutions process then please get in touch with the NFWI Public Affairs department.

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