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The Scottish  
Parliament

Stewart Stevenson

Member of Parliament for  
Banff & Buchan

30 March 2004

Mr Eric Gray  
Primary Care Division  
Scottish Executive Health Department  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

Dear Mr Gray

**Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland.**  
**Response to Scottish Executive Consultation Paper.**

I write in response to the above consultation currently being carried out and am pleased to offer the following observations. I wish to focus primarily on service delivery aspects which are an issue of importance and concern to many of my constituents.

Firstly, I fully agree with the Scottish Executive's introduction to the consultation that Scotland generally has a substantially poorer level of oral health than that in England, Wales and many other countries in Europe.

It is undoubtedly correct to say that more Scottish adults retain natural teeth than was the case thirty years ago. It is also correct to say that General Dental Services (GDS) are still, largely, concerned with 'care and repair', rather than prevention. Preventative healthcare is always preferable to treatment after the event and I welcome the recognition in the consultation paper that more requires to be done in this area.

However, for many areas of the country, and I include my own constituency in this, we are in danger of reverting to the situation where we actually see a decrease in the numbers of adults retaining natural teeth simply due to the fact that access to such 'care and repair' dental services is becoming more and more difficult.

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Urgent action requires to be taken at Scottish Executive Health Department level to increase access to GDS in many parts of rural Scotland. The targeting of the 'Golden Hello' scheme of payments to dentists to locate in the areas of most desperate need is something that I called for and I welcome its introduction. Unfortunately, this initiative alone will deliver neither an increase in the level of oral health nor a discernible increase in the level of access to dental services. At this stage it appears that it has had no effect in the very areas it was supposed to assist.

Until such time as gaps in provision can be filled in this way, urgent consideration should be given to using methods such as:

- Mobile dental units
- Opening up of Community and School dentists to general provision
- Salaried NHS dentists providing treatment in areas affected by closures and retirements

I note that the Executive has set not targets for dentistry in 2004-5. It is a matter of urgency that that is corrected.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that NHS dental services are of little importance to the Executive. It is crucial that dental services are supported by creating a duty on Health Boards to allocate a General Dental Practitioner to provide NHS service to patients otherwise unable to get on a dentist list. As an indication of the seriousness with which I view this area of Primary Care, I will seeking a date for implementation within the term of this present Parliament.

Finally, while I am pleased that the Scottish Executive is carrying out this exercise, I do hope that the conclusions can be reached rapidly to allow early implementation of what, I hope, will be measures which will benefit those of my constituents currently excluded from NHS dental services.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

STEWART STEVENSON MSP

cc.- Tom McCabe MSP