

Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland Consultation

A response.

Before considering the three questions outlined in the consultation document, I feel that NHS Highland needs to ask the primary question vis.-

"Is there an NHS Dental Service in Highland to modernise?"

Between 1999 and 2002 eleven dental practices closed to NHS patients in Highland – more than any other region in Scotland. These practices were lost to NHS patients because dentists felt that they could not offer a satisfactory professional service under the restrictions imposed upon them.

At a time when dental practice in the UK and in Scotland is regarded as equivalent to that of a third world nation, this situation is an indictment on the whole dental service from the Executive down (or up?) to the various boards.

In particular, in Highland only 36% of adults received NHS dental care in 2002 and this unacceptable figure fell even lower, to 34%, in 2003.. This compares with a national figure of only 49% for each of these years.

As a patient who has had to "go private" in order to get treatment I consider these figures to be a disgrace.

Consultation questions.

A) What sort of dental service should be provided under the NHS?

The situation now is so bad that it doesn't seem to matter what sort of service is provided, so long as some service is made available.

High Street dental practices, or NHS run and staffed clinics, the patient just needs to see a dentist as the need arises.

This raises the question of the number of dentists who are available. We need to make urgent provision of training course places in Scotland to produce more properly trained dentists each and every year and I would suggest that as a base figure we should be **doubling** the number currently available, as a minimum.

B) How should NHS dental services be delivered?

Until there are sufficient dentists to cope with the demand for NHS dental treatment this question is unnecessary. However in an ideal world, dentists should be treated like any other professional. They know what is needed in terms of properly qualified staffing, technical support and financing to run a professional practice and should be left to get on with the job. It would seem that the NHS has fallen so low in their estimation that many would not consider returning to the fold, so, in these circumstances, NHS dental clinics staffed by salaried dentists and providing the highest standards of service should be set up.

C) How should patients contribute to the cost of the service?

Patients have already paid for dental services as they have paid for medical services, through their National Insurance Contributions over a lifetime of working and like medical services, should be free at the point of delivery, paid for already. If it is necessary to find more money, I suggest one or two pence in the pound in PAYE taxes, together with a drastic cut in the number of "Administrators" employed by the NHS.