

Regional European Organisation of the FDI

National Report

Country: UK

Association: British Dental Association

Venue:

Year: 2020

Please classify your national report by following subjects:

Changes in the association and its organisation

- Martin Woodrow became the BDA's Chief Executive in February 2020 after having held the role of Acting CEO since August 2018.
- Eddie Crouch was elected Chair of the BDA's Board in September 2020, taking over from Mick Armstrong, who had held the post since 2014. Mick Armstrong remains on the BDA's Board.
- The BDA launched a major governance review in February 2020, looking at practical ways to reflect the diversity that exists within dentistry, whether in terms of gender, ethnicity, age or type of practice. A particular focus of this is to encourage younger dentists from a variety of backgrounds to get involved with the BDA at national and local level.
- The BDA Office in central London has been closed to staff and members since March 2020, although in between lockdowns the library was open on occasions. The BDA's educational provision has moved online and a significant amount of webinars across the BDA's audiences is being provided.

Trends and developments:

- **in professional politics**
- **in health and social politics**
- **in educational politics**
- **in the insurance system (incl. the public health insurance and private insurance schemes)**

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all areas significantly. In the UK, it led to a first national lockdown from 23 March 2020, which was gradually lifted from early June 2020. In this lockdown, dental practices were effectively closed and providing only remote consultations and triaging, while treatment was carried out in new urgent dental care centres. A second lockdown took place during November 2020 into early December, with a third one starting on 5 January 2021 and expected to be gradually lifted from mid-March 2021. Dental practices have not needed to close during these two lockdowns. Nevertheless, the pandemic has radically affected the delivery of dentistry.

2020 saw the BDA's work concentrate on supporting the profession through this difficult time in whichever way we could, directly through our services and of course through political activity. We set up our dedicated coronavirus news and advice pages, developed tools for members such as a furlough calculator, webinars on financial issues, and an extensive FAQ page to deal with member queries. We have also provided an extensive toolkit for practices. We demanded a financial support strategy for the dental sector. Chancellor Rishi Sunak pledged furloughing, loans and cash grants, and practices with a National Health Service (NHS) contract in England were able to rely on continuing payments. These support measures took different shapes due to the different health systems operating in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Support payments for dental practices and individuals with a significant private dentistry contingent were not readily available due to the restrictions placed by government in relation to maximum income levels for this support. Our campaign for private practices garnered cross-party support early on, with 101 MPs signing our letter calling on the government to consider the plight of dentists.

By the time of writing this report, the effects of the pandemic on dentistry have become clearer: official data on activity indicates treatments delivered by NHS dental services in England are at a quarter of pre-COVID levels. Over 14.5 million fewer treatments were delivered in 2020 compared to 2019.

One of the reasons for the significant decline of patient attendance, apart from patients' own fears of infection and the need to use more time between appointments to ensure social distancing, are the regulations governing the provision of Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs) which require long periods of 'fallow time' between patients. More recent recommendations by the Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Programme (SDCEP) are now reducing this to as little as 10 minutes where dentists can demonstrate a sufficient number of air changes per hour (ACH) in their surgeries, although this is subject to site assessment and potential need for new equipment. With practices already struggling to remain financially sustainable, the BDA has stressed the government must provide capital funding for this.

In tandem with the first lockdown, figures have shown that antibiotic prescribing in April to July 2020 was 25% higher than April to July 2019, with a peak in June 2020. This is against a downwards trend before the pandemic.

The BDA is also in intense discussions with the Government on the dental contract of the future. These discussions have been ongoing for several years but are particularly focused on the current situation as the projected annual levels of activity and provision can clearly not be achieved and the modified targets have been heavily criticised as unworkable. In addition, significant announcements on the reconfiguration of the National Health Service in England were made in early 2021 and we will engage fully with these developments.

The BDA anticipates that many patients with untreated decay will end up requiring more extensive and costly interventions as result of limited access to dental services. Oral cancers are on the rise, and the waiting lists for hospital tooth extractions in children, which were significant before the pandemic, have further increased. Tooth decay has been the number one reason for hospital admissions among young children in recent years.

The pandemic has clearly also affected the provision of dental education, both undergraduate and postgraduate. While it was possible to change some systems to accommodate the fact that direct contact with students and young dentists in universities and other training settings was not possible, the effects of this year on the experience and confidence of anyone in dental training, possibly for the next few years, must not be underestimated. The UK's dental schools, regulators, workforce planning organisations and professional bodies have issues for dental education at the top of their agenda.

Corporate Dentistry

Position of NDA towards dental chains

Dental corporate bodies are a reality in the UK; they range from small practices who have become limited companies, to small or medium chains of practices, to the big, sometimes internationally known companies. The BDA published research about the development and activities of dental corporate bodies in 2019. We do not

have a specific political position about corporate dentistry in the UK but support the tenet of the Council of European Dentists' (CED's) resolution on the matter. We provide advice to member dentists working in dental corporates on contracts and work arrangements and believe that the General Dental Council should start registering (and therefore regulating) dental corporate bodies in the UK.

Problems with dental chains.

In early 2020, a small dental chain (Finest Dental) went bankrupt, closing its doors suddenly and leaving patients and staff who worked at its practices in an uncertain situation.

Some dental chains have also closed practices that were not profitable, leaving some towns to cope with the sudden loss of dental provision for patients.

Information regarding promotion of the World Oral Health Day

Not available at the time of writing.

Further information (activities):

Non-COVID-19 themes and activities

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** In collaboration with Public Health England and a number of other key partners, the BDA held a round-table event in London on 20 February 2020 to highlight the challenges dentists are facing in relation to stress and anxiety. Participants considered the support currently available and suggested ways to improve provision for dentists and their teams across the UK and across dentistry's wide variety of fields of practice. Anxiety, stress and burnout remain prevalent within dentistry, with BDA research indicating almost half of dentists state that stress in their job exceeds their ability to cope and almost one fifth reporting suicidal thoughts. The effects of the pandemic on the mental well-being of healthcare professionals is of central importance across the health sector, and the BDA is involved in a number of wider initiatives to promote available services.
- **Racism in dentistry:** the BDA has set out its commitment to tackle racism and discrimination at all levels in dentistry, in response to the international outcry that followed the death of George Floyd in May and the resultant Black Lives Matter movement. The association has embarked on a research project across the wider profession to identify clearly those areas where racial disparities, racism and discrimination exist within dentistry and develop an evidence-based action plan to address them. The underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the professional leadership is also relevant in this context at the BDA has in addition started a far-reaching project on equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **Sugar tax :** In October, the BDA urged ministers to increase work with the food industry after a new official report indicated minimal progress to reduce sugar levels in food, Data from the government's flagship sugar reduction programme shows the food industry has cut barely 3% of sugar from products bought in shops and supermarkets over the last four years. We pointed to the success of mandatory action through the sugar levy, which has seen a 44% fall in the sugar levels in soft drinks since 2015, with many companies taking out sugar to avoid exposure to the tax. Tooth decay remains the number one reason for hospital admissions among young children, and oral health inequalities are expected to widen further, driven by unprecedented access problems, the suspension of public health programmes, and sugar-laden lockdown diets.
- **100 years BDA Library :** In January, the BDA Library celebrated 100 years from its inception in 1920 to becoming the most comprehensive dental library in Europe today. Initiated in part by WH Dolamore and Lilian Lindsay, two eminent dentists long involved with the BDA, the library first began its life as a small resource in the BDA's original building in 23 Russell Square, London in 1920.

What are your 3 main concerns?

- Recovery from the pandemic and the 'new normal' in dentistry
- The effects on dental education across the board (undergraduate, postgraduate, specialisation) and the available workforce
- Future contracting arrangements in dentistry and reconfiguration of the NHS system.

3 points you would like to discuss

- How other countries have dealt with the educational challenges caused by the pandemic
-
-
-