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DTA highlights key issues for NHS dentistry

Representatives of the Dental Technologist Association (DTA) have already met many of the MPs and others who will attend future meetings of the Westminster Health Forum - where policy makers in Parliament, Whitehall and government agencies engage with key stakeholders such as health professionals. As a result, the DTA response to the Steele Report into the future of NHS dentistry has been 'flagged up'.

In addition, the DTA has communicated to the Westminster Health Forum and formally to Parliament the views of its members on two key issues:

- direct payment to dental laboratories for custom-made dental appliances
- ensuring that patients are given a Statement of Conformity upon receipt of a custom-made dental appliance

With regard to direct payment, the Steele Report highlighted a range of potential changes, which, if taken forward could significantly improve the provision of NHS dentistry. Personal oral health care and individuals being guided towards caring for their own dentition as a precursor to providing dental complex restorations were proposed. This would allow redistribution within the dental budget at a time when dental technicians are being asked to provide more complex partial dentures and bridgework for an aging NHS population. Instead of, as now, the dentist paying the cost of dental appliances - and invariably seeking the lowest price - the report suggested that patients could pay the dental laboratory directly, either in cash or vouchers. The DTA believes this would lead to improved quality and accountability.

The Dental Technologist Association

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A Statement of Conformity given to patients supplied with Custom Made Dental Devices is another proposal from the Steele Report welcomed by the DTA. Dental technologists make and supply dentists with custom-made dental appliances in specialist dental laboratories. The dentist then fits these appliances to the patient. Each appliance is supplied to a dentist with a Statement of Conformity - the warranty and confirmation of the Quality Assurance of the appliance. Often, this statement is not given to the patient.

The DTA believes it should be in all cases. The Statement of Conformity indicates that the appliance has been made under the direct control of a GDC-registered dental technician in accordance with good manufacturing procedures and that traceability of the components and the manufacturing processes is supported. As part of the drive for greater patient awareness and protection, the Statement of Conformity should be given to the patient.

The proposals in the Steele Report are that this procedure be adopted from 2011, whereas the DTA is urging earlier execution.

In conclusion, the DTA eagerly awaits the implementation and results of the proposed pilot schemes in the Steele Report - particularly those linked directly with the work of dental technologists.

ENDS.

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