OFT Launches Dentistry Market Study

The OFT today launched a market study which will examine whether the private and NHS dentistry markets are working well for patients.

The UK market for dental services was worth £7.2 billion in 2010. Forecasts suggest this could grow to £8.2 billion by 2014 with much of the growth coming from the private market. While the OFT recognises that the UK has some of the highest standards of oral care in the world, it wants to examine concerns raised by consumer bodies such as Which? that many patients are confused over dental treatments and prices.

The study will focus on how dentistry services are sold, whether patients are given appropriate information to help them choose between dental practices, the types of treatments on offer and different payment methods in the context of both NHS and private dentistry. It will also look at how easy it is to change dentists, and whether the current system for customer redress works.

The study will also examine whether there are any unnecessary barriers to new practices entering either private or NHS funded markets,
and consider the issue of professional restrictions on direct access to specialists or providers of auxiliary services, such as hygienists.

Sonya Branch, OFT Senior Director for Services, Infrastructure and Public Markets, said:

'Patients appear to be confused about the prices they are being charged and concerns have been raised that they may not be getting sufficient information or adequate choice over the dental treatments they receive.

'We also note that the costs of private dental treatment in England are among the highest in Europe. Given the current strains on people’s finances, we think it is a good time to examine whether competition is working effectively to drive up the quality of private and NHS dental services and deliver better value for money for consumers.'

The OFT will work with the General Dental Council, the Department of Health, the Care Quality Commission and others during the course of its study. It will also seek representations from dentistry providers and trade bodies. Parties interested in contributing can contact the OFT at dentistry@oft.gsi.gov.uk.

The OFT plans to complete the study by March 2012.

NOTES
1. Further information on the OFT's dentistry market study, including the full scoping document, is available on the OFT website.
2. OFT market studies are carried out under section 5 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (EA02) which allows the OFT to obtain information and conduct research. Effectively, they allow a market-wide consideration of both competition and consumer issues. They take an overview of regulatory and other economic drivers in the market and consumer and business behaviour. Possible outcomes of market studies include: enforcement action by the OFT, a market investigation reference to the Competition Commission (CC), recommendations for changes in laws and regulations, recommendations to regulators, self-regulatory bodies and others to consider changes to their rules, campaigns to promote consumer education and awareness, or a clean bill of health.

3. Download Market Studies – guidance on the OFT approach (pdf 586kb); guidance for companies and their advisers and other interested parties on the procedures that the OFT will usually follow when conducting market studies.

4. In 2003, the OFT carried out a market study into the private dental market which made a number of recommendations to improve consumer information and complaints procedures, and reduce professional restrictions. While progress has been made, recent evidence suggests that certain concerns remain and new potential issues have emerged.

MEDIA enquiries: 020 7211 +
Frank Shepherd 8133 Kasia Reardon 8901
Adrian Ient 8899 Pritie Billimoria 8708

Out of hours: mobile: 07774 134814

www.of.gov.uk www/twitter.com/OFTgov