

Friday, 24 April 2020

Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3SQ

Re. Financial Support Scheme (FSS) & governance

Dear Minister

As you have been made aware, FSS calculations for April have disproportionately impacted female dental practitioners who had been off on maternity leave during the reference period, resulting in significant shortfalls in pay, and consequently high levels of stress and anxiety for those concerned. We are also aware where other individual circumstances have not been factored into the initial FSS calculations, again leaving individual practitioners out of pocket.

The inability of dentists who have been unfairly impacted to be able to engage directly with officials to query their payments, or to receive any assurance whatsoever that their individual circumstances will be revisited, has simply compounded to the high level of stress of those affected.

We trust you will agree, it is simply not right that dental professionals have been left with no other means of redress but to seek assistance from elected representatives. For some years, BDA has voiced our concerns with the Permanent Secretary regarding how dentistry is administered within the Department of Health, not least the wholly inadequate level of resource dedicated to dentistry within General Dental, Ophthalmic Services and Criminal Justice Healthcare. In addition, the lack of a deputy CDO during the CDO's previous absence, or policy support for the CDO, and the seeming disconnect between the CDO and GDOS has been unhelpful.

In seeking to ensure a fair outcome for impacted practitioners at this time, **we write to request BDA input into an urgent meeting with DoH/HSCB/BSO officials to consider those categories of individual circumstances that have emerged as problematic -early next week (w/c 27th April) -as per the commitment that had been given to us previously.**

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We also ask that a breakdown of payments would be provided to all GDPs in receipt of FSS, so that practitioners have a greater degree of understanding, and for transparency in how payments have been worked out.

DDRB Uplift

At this time of financial uncertainty, dental practitioners cannot continue to wait on backpay owing to them from the 2019/20 DDRB uplift. We have been told that the necessary work to process these payments will be started once FSS issues are resolved.

With respect, this work should have been completed months ago (the DDRB 19/20 reported in July last year), and lengthy delays in applying DDRB uplifts have occurred year after year. It is unacceptable that payments owing to practitioners for such a period of time cannot be processed, again, down to lack of capacity within DoH.

As many practices in Northern Ireland are on a financial knife-edge, we urge you to make it a priority to ensure backpay owing to dentists is paid without any further delay.

I look forward to receiving the Department's response.

Yours sincerely



Richard Graham
Chair, NIDPC