



Ms Kate Forbes MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

By email

22 June 2020

Dear Ms Forbes

I wrote to you on 22 April – exactly two months ago – on behalf of the British Dental Association (BDA) expressing serious concerns about the financial viability of private dentistry in Scotland during the current pandemic crisis. It is disappointing that we did not receive a reply (or even an acknowledgement) to the letter, or to the follow-up email we sent on 20 May.

Wholly private practices – which represent only around 20 of the 1,000 or so practices in Scotland – have been able to reopen for several weeks. Practices offering NHS treatment, or a mixture of NHS and private treatment – can reopen from today. Mixed NHS-private practices represent the vast majority of practices in Scotland.

NHS and mixed practices will continue to receive the current level of NHS financial support (80% of average Item of Service income, plus patient contributions). However, this only applies to the NHS element of overall income; mixed practices have received little or no income to support the loss of private income. Practices' costs will increase as they start to reopen from today, as they will have to start paying unfurloughed staff, and spending on materials and lab bills will rise. However, income will remain static which will increase the financial pressure on mixed practices, especially those with a high percentage of private income. This will raise the financial pressure on mixed practices from today, and some colleagues have advised that they cannot afford to reopen.

The pandemic has caused a massive backlog of unmet dental need since practices were instructed to cease face-to-face treatment on 23 March. In a letter to the profession on 18 March, the Chief Dental Officer stated:

The Scottish Government's policy is to ensure that practices do not fail and we will be supporting you across a range of funding streams.

Also, in a response to a question from Miles Briggs MSP last Thursday (18 June), the First Minister stated:

They (dentists) will have support from the Scottish Government to the extent that they need it in the weeks ahead.

Given these assurances, we again implore the Scottish Government to provide urgent financial support to private dentistry within mixed practices to ensure it remains viable. Without this support, colleagues have advised that they may be forced to close their practices as they will no longer be financially sustainable. This would be nothing short of a disaster for oral health in Scotland.

I look forward to your response at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David McColl', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David McColl
Chair, BDA Scottish Dental Practice Committee

cc. Mr Joe FitzPatrick, MSP
Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing

cc. Members of the Scottish Parliament