



20<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**By email:**

Michael O'Neill  
Head of General Dental & Ophthalmic Services  
Department of Health  
Room C3.27  
Castle Buildings  
Belfast BT4 3SQ

Dear Michael

Further to my letter of 6<sup>th</sup> February, and in respect of matters raised with the Department on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, we write to seek urgent clarity on what financial arrangements will be in place from the start of next financial year.

I cannot stress enough the gravity of the current situation in GDS, and the consequences on the most vulnerable in society if a meaningful financial uplift is not put in place after RSS is due to expire at end of March. The end of February deadline is fast approaching, and practitioners have been assured of one month's notice of any changes in remuneration arrangements.

You may be aware that the BBC contacted the BDA last month in the interests of public service broadcasting. They were aware of the difficulties members of the public are facing in accessing health service dentistry, and the ultimate impact on societal inequalities in oral health. BDA NI provided the BBC with a spreadsheet compiled by the Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee using figures from a mixed group of practices to illustrate the economics of the current contract, we included the 10% uplift, the 25% on dentures and the allowances. We advised the BBC that these figures were the only representation of the economic situation in NHS dental practice in NI at the moment, as unfortunately no Department-based figures exist. This is despite repeated requests for a Cost of Service review to be undertaken ahead of a fees recalibration exercise that reflects the actual costs to deliver care.

British Dental Association

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This representation of the economics of the dental contract is wholly consistent with what is happening on the ground in dentistry in terms of difficulties with access to, and availability of NHS dentistry. We advised that if the model worked and high-level figures translated to a workable dental business, there would be no issues.

In the absence of an Assembly and Executive, we are concerned this is just one of many urgent matters slipping further down the political agenda. In the event of a 'cliff-edge' scenario to GDS support, the loss of talented young practitioners will exacerbate the problem, and further jeopardise the future sustainability of Health Service Dentistry. The potential for oral health failures in the future cannot be underestimated.

Dental practices in Northern Ireland need urgent and meaningful assurances to be forthcoming from the Department as to what happens after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

Inaction means GDPs, who need to know how they will pay their bills and whose creditors require cashflow forecasts, are being forced to leave NHS dentistry in order to balance their books and secure the future of their businesses.

With just weeks until the end of the financial year, some form of communication with assurances forthcoming from the Department is essential.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ciara Gallagher'.

Ciara Gallagher  
NIDPC Chair