



## **An Open Letter**

Mr Peter May  
Permanent Secretary  
Department of Health  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3SQ

30 January 2024

Dear Peter

### **What's the plan for Health Service dentistry?**

We the undersigned General Dental Practitioners feel compelled to write at this time to ask:

### **What is the Department of Health's plan to ensure Health Service dentistry has a future?**

Despite clear evidence and repeated warnings issued by the British Dental Association about the death spiral Health Service dentistry in Northern Ireland appears to be in we have seen inaction from the authorities.

Vital public services are at stake. Livelihoods hang in the balance. We ask that you are transparent with us and with the patients who rely on our services.

Scotland has recently moved to reform dental payments. Meanwhile your Department has so far failed to bring forward any serious proposals to put dental services on a sustainable financial footing.

We now have an underspend projected for this year's dental budget. Not because of any lack of demand from patients but because struggling practices need support to deliver. DoH has failed to commit to reinvest this underspend into stabilising a service which is on the brink.

The imminent ban on dental amalgam represents an existential threat to NHS dentistry. In Strasbourg MEPs backed amendments calling on member states to support practices with the

added costs of alternative materials and to reduce the clear impact this will have on the patients who need us most.

We require the Department to do no less.

Our signatures are testament to the intolerable pressure which this service is under. We cannot go on as we are. We need your Department to show leadership and take action now.

Evidence shows that the move away from Health Service dentistry is well and truly underway. In the continued absence of payment reform proposals colleagues will be increasingly driven out of Health Service dentistry to keep their practices afloat.

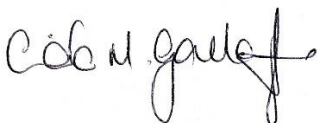
We are passionate about maintaining a future for Health Service dentistry and we want to continue providing access to these vital services for our patients.

But this now hinges on you acting urgently in the public interest and investing to stabilise and reform the service. Continued inaction will result in significant detriment to the provision of this vital public service. We cannot wait on if or when politicians decide they want to restore a devolved Assembly and Executive.

This isn't a matter of the Department finally delivering a late pay rise this year. We need to know what you intend to do to fix the crumbling foundations this service is built on.

Please share your plan for Health Service dentistry with the profession and the public.

Yours sincerely

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

Ciara Gallagher

**Chair, Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee**

Co-signed as follows: