



Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Sent by email

5 July 2021

Dear Mr Javid,

On behalf of the country's 42,000 dentists, please accept our congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

We recognise the daunting to-do list ahead of you. We are writing to explain why dentistry must form part of that agenda. Over 30 million NHS appointments have been lost since lockdown, and strict COVID measures mean millions more still have little chance of securing care.

We want to work with you, as we are already working with your team, to find concrete solutions. To that end we are sending this message following our recent candid and constructive meeting with Jo Churchill MP.

A roadmap to recovery

As we approach 'Freedom Day' our members continue to operate to standard operating procedures designed at the height of the first wave.

The result has slashed capacity at practices across England. Millions now have little prospect of securing care, and many dedicated practitioners are thinking twice about their future in this service. If we are to return services to something resembling normality, the ongoing restrictions must be urgently reassessed.

We want to see an evidence-based approach, which can enable us to take the safest and fastest route back towards normality. We have welcomed joint statements from all four of UK's Chief Dental Officers calling for a review of the infection and prevention control guidance, and we seek your commitment to developing a clear roadmap to recovery.

The UK has chosen a route almost no other nation has taken. In March 2020 we supported a precautionary approach in the face of a novel virus. In July 2021 we have to balance the risks from COVID with clear threats to patients' oral health and the long-term sustainability of the dental service.

A way forward on Contract Reform

The crisis in NHS services predates COVID, and has been driven by the target-driven contract imposed on high street dentists in 2006. This left workforce and access problems as the norm, particularly in England's post-industrial, rural and coastal communities.

A system of rigid tick boxes and targets has of course been wholly incompatible with providing care in a pandemic. Moving forward we want to ensure we have a model that removes barriers to care, particularly for the most vulnerable, and where dentists would actually choose to build a career.

We welcome the messages from both Jo Churchill and NHS England that this model is not sustainable going forward. We hope you are willing to echo the recent sentiment of the Welsh Government, that there can be no going back to this failed system.

Action on inequality

Tooth decay remains the number one reason for hospital admissions among young children, and those in England's most deprived communities are seeing the oral health gap widening. So we have welcomed stated commitments from the Department on both fluoridation and supervised toothbrushing.

The data from Public Health England is clear cut. These initiatives would more than pay for themselves, through a reduction in treatment need.

A pandemic is precisely the right time to double-down on prevention. And we hope you can reassure us there will be no delay to on consulting on full rollout of both policies.

The cost of dentistry remains an inequalities issue. Yes, exemptions from dental charges exist but many on modest incomes continue to feel 'priced out'.

Dentistry is the only NHS service that entered the pandemic on a lower cash budget than it received a decade ago, with patients paying in an ever-greater share of funding through charges. We urge you to draw a line under these inflation-busting increases, to ensure we have a sustainable funding model in place that does not represent a barrier to care.

Tackling the backlogs

On backlogs, we appreciate your reality check that the situation across the NHS is likely to get worse before it gets better.

As stated, a roadmap to normality offers the surest means of tackling the unprecedented and growing backlogs across primary care. However, as part of that approach, we are seeking from you the same commitments offered to dentists by every other UK nation, through capital funding for ventilation equipment. This would help practices cut the gaps between appointments mandated in current guidance, safely increasing access for patients.

Again, investment here would more than pay for itself short term, by restoring lost patient charge revenues. It would also have an immediate impact on capacity, and future-proof practices against a virus we will now all have to learn to live with.

Many of our members have already had to take on additional debts to finance this kit and boost patient numbers. It is only fair they receive support too, and can claim retrospectively, just like their colleagues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

However, our colleagues in community and hospital services also require assistance. Together with organisations including Mencap we have long sought clarity on waiting times for elective extractions of teeth among children and vulnerable adults, which typically take place under general anaesthesia in secondary care.

Your predecessor announced in March in the Mandate that the Government would commit "£1 billion to support hospitals to begin tackling backlogs in elective care, addressing the most urgent cases and particularly those who have been waiting for more than 52 weeks for treatment".

Yearlong waiting times were commonplace even before lockdown for GA dental procedures. We do not seek special treatment here, merely assurances this funding will be shared equitably, to support some of our most vulnerable patients.

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We are conscious complaints about access to dental services are filling up your parliamentary colleagues' postbags as never before.

Today marks the 73rd birthday of the NHS. Urgent action here to guarantee the future of the dental service is a logical extension of any 'levelling up' agenda. We hope you take this opportunity to build back better and fairer.



Eddie Crouch
Chair, British Dental Association



Shawn Charlwood
Chair, General Dental Practice Committee
British Dental Association

cc: Jo Churchill MP, DHSC; Sara Hurley