

**FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH**



Paul Brennan  
Chair of NI Council, British Dental Association

Ciara Gallagher  
Chair of NI Dental Practice Committee

[Tristen.Kelso@bda.org](mailto:Tristen.Kelso@bda.org)

Dear *Paul and Ciara*

Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ  
Tel: 028 9052 2556  
Email: [private.office@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@health-ni.gov.uk)

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Date: *9* March 2026

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 January 2026 raising concerns about the provision of dental services in so-called 'pop-up' clinics and the wider issue of dental tourism and also enclosing a letter from all Northern Ireland Local Dental Committees to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).

I note the content of the letter, dated 09 January 2026, from the Local Dental Committees (LDCs). Departmental officials have followed up with RQIA in respect of this correspondence, and they have been advised that RQIA responded on the 06 February 2026. I am advised that RQIA first received intelligence about an overseas dental provider holding a consultation event in a hotel in Northern Ireland in October 2023 and since then intelligence about numerous further such consultations events has been shared with RQIA. RQIA have noted that several of these overseas providers have returned to hold further consultation events. RQIA have also updated officials on its actions, including an unannounced visit by two RQIA representatives, in relation to a permanent premises operating on the Lisburn Road which has been raised by the LDCs in their letter. You will appreciate it would not be appropriate to comment on an individual case.

I understand that a meeting has been scheduled for late March between RQIA and the BDA which will focus on these important issues.

In Northern Ireland, the regulatory position is that to offer private dental consultations, the individual practitioner providing the service must be registered with the General Dental Council (GDC); and the "establishment" used must be registered with Regulation and Quality

Improvement Authority (RQIA) in accordance with Article 12 of the HPSS (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Independent Healthcare Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. These Regulations also require the practitioners involved to be registered with the GDC, as a condition of registration of the establishment.

My Department is aware that there has been an increase across the UK of dental companies from outside of the United Kingdom (UK) offering a “consultation” at a venue in Northern Ireland or Great Britain (GB) prior to patients travelling abroad for dental treatment. If the “consultation” were to fall into the “practise of dentistry” then this is illegal unless the dental professional is registered with the GDC and the premises are registered with RQIA.

RQIA do not have legislative powers to prosecute for the illegal practice of dentistry, these powers sit with the General Dental Council who can gather evidence of illegal dental practice or investigate allegations of illegal practice.

RQIA under their statutory legislation are responsible for regulation and inspection of independent dental clinics (as independent healthcare establishments) but these are premises in which professionally registered people are working. Any service offering private dental care and treatment is required to register with RQIA, and failure to do so is an offence.

Both RQIA and the GDC have recently updated their information for patients considering dental treatment abroad and having attended a dental ‘pop-up’ event in the UK beforehand. This is available through their respective websites. This includes advice for patients on questions that they should ask to ensure they are aware of the risks of travelling abroad for care.

The issue of a patient attending a dentist in Northern Ireland after having received dental treatment overseas has been raised as a concern, particularly if the patient presents in acute pain or with complications. You will be aware that registered dental professionals are expected to act in the best interests of the patient in pain regardless of where treatment was previously provided. GDC standards require a dental professional to only provide care for which they are appropriately trained, competent and indemnified to provide.

It is important to stress that where a patient has received their care previously does not impact on their eligibility for accessing Health Service care in the future.

Any intelligence received by my Department in relation to potentially illegal dental examinations, procedures or consultations is shared with the relevant regulatory bodies. RQIA also has a process whereby any intelligence it receives in relation to such pop-up clinics and dental tourism is shared with the GDC, the Department's Chief Dental Officer and the Department's Strategic Planning and Performance Group Services, for consideration of any actions, under their relevant powers and responsibilities, that is deemed necessary in the circumstances.

Protecting patients and maintaining public confidence in the regulation of dental services remains an important issue, and my Department will continue to work closely with RQIA, the GDC and other stakeholders to ensure that the existing regulatory framework is applied robustly.

I hope you find this response helpful

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Nesbitt', with a horizontal line at the end.

**Mike Nesbitt MLA**  
**Minister of Health**

