

By email

Mr Darren Johnston
Consultant Orthodontist
Chair of the Northern Ireland Hospital Dental
Services Forum

Strategic Planning and Performance Group

Directorate of Primary Care

County Hall

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Date: 14 May 2024

Dear Darren

Thank you for your letter of 17 April 2024 sent in your capacity as Chair of the Northern Ireland (NI) Hospital Dental Services (HDS) Forum. Taking each of the issues you raised in turn:

Dental and Maxillo-facial Radiologist

Thank you for providing very helpful information on the role of a Consultant DMFR, the changing landscape of dental radiology within HDS and General Dental Services (GDS), the service level agreements disparities across the Trusts in accessing DMFR, BHSC monthly expenditure on outsourcing DMFR reports and the potential clinical, professional and educational risks of the current situation. Thank you also for your email of 2 May 2024 which contained a report from Ms Orlagh McPolin (SpR, DMFR) and additional contacts in the DMFR field.

SPPG have engaged with Ms Ann Garrahy, Clinical Lead OMFS SEHSCT, to gain an OMFS perspective in relation access to a DMFR consultant. We have also consulted with Ms Ciara Campbell, Consultant Orthodontist SHSCT, who recently raised issues on access to DMFR. Ms Campbell has kindly included SPPG in her correspondence with a number of radiology consultants in the SHSCT and SEHSCT and they have suggested developing a regional solution, as a singly qualified dental radiologist would be unable to participate in Trust on-call rotas.

The SPPG initial objective is to undertake a needs assessment to gather evidence for a DMFR service at both Trust and regional levels. The SPPG will seek quantitative information from Trusts and will explore options that meet this need. It is an essential requirement that, in giving consideration to any request for a new service, a robust business case will need to be developed. To do this we will need compelling evidence that the investment sought offers improved patient outcomes, demonstrates value for money and is consistent with current regional strategies. In the current financial climate, the business case will be competing against other strong funding requests to improve HSC services.

Regional Cleft Orthodontist

The second issue you have raised is in relation to a Regional Cleft Orthodontist. I acknowledge that this issue has a long-standing history with previous funding being utilised to support hospital orthodontic services around the system. I thank you again for all the information you supplied in your letter and in previous correspondence and I note that a meeting to try and progress this issue is arranged between yourself and SPPG on 14 May 2024.

SPPG Hospital Commissioning Services Directorate have confirmed that they are still pursuing a source for the additional funds requested in the business case submitted by the NHSCT in September 2022. As stated above, all business cases for development of HSC services are competitively scrutinised against others and unfortunately, to date, this particular business case has not proven to be successful. In advance of our meeting, I will endeavour to obtain some feedback on the reason/reasons why this business case has not succeeded in attracting the required funding in the hope that we may be able to make an improved submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Donaldson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'M'.

Michael Donaldson
Head of Dental Services

cc: Caroline Lappin, Chief Dental Officer, DoH
Sinead Preston, Regional Lead for HDS, CDS and DPH, SPPG