

The Welsh Assembly's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's Inquiry into Dentistry in Wales 2018

Post-Hearing Note to the Chair by the BDA Wales

4 October 2018



The BDA

We are the voice of dentists and dental students in the UK. We bring dentists together, support our members through advice and education, and represent their interests. As the trade union and professional body, we represent all fields of dentistry including general practice, community dental services, the armed forces, hospitals, academia, public health and research.

Introduction

Dr Dai Lloyd
Chair of the Health Social Care and Sport Committee

4 October 2018

Dear Dr Lloyd,

We wish to convey our sincere thanks to the members of the Committee for the opportunity to present our evidence about dentistry in Wales at the Inquiry hearing on 27 September 2018.

BDA Wales members were pleased to have the opportunity to explain the challenges that dentists are facing in their day to day work and how patients are being adversely impacted by the constraints of the current contract.

On your advice, this is an additional note of information to furnish the committee with some further detail that the panel members were asking for regarding numbers of private practices and Designed to Smile data.

In addition, there is some further evidence included herein regarding the decline in access to NHS dentistry, which will help to demonstrate the concerning trends.

We look forward to receiving the transcript from the day and the final report from the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Caroline Seddon

National Director BDA Wales

The BDA Wales Pledge

BDA Wales will undertake to:

- **Conduct further research into UDA values, clawback, contract reduction, and patient access to dentistry**
- **Undertake further quantitative and qualitative data analysis - to build up a picture of the state of NHS dentistry in Wales to determine the trends**
- **Challenge the Government and the Health Boards to improve access to dentistry for all**
- **Lobby for a contract that is fit for purpose and a sufficient workforce to deliver it**

Trends in Access to NHS Dentistry

The BDA would strongly refute the Government's latest reaction to our new patient access figures - that the numbers can be 'variable' - suggesting they can be ignored in effect. The Government is not taking our research seriously. We met with the CDO and Dental Policy Advisor in August to share the headline data on access for new patients saying we would include them in our Inquiry response. We explained that the detailed data at Health Board level were included in the paper submitted to the BDJ. However, it may be helpful for the committee to see the results for Cardiff and Vale which showed the lowest access numbers, in order convey the severity of low access in some parts of Wales.

Since 2012, access for new patients has more than halved, down from an average of 37% to an average of 15% for new adult patients. Moreover, the averages hide the contrasting data in our paper to the BDJ, which includes a breakdown by Health Board. In Cardiff and Vale, the access is shockingly low with just 3% of practices taking on adults and 6% accepting children for NHS treatment.

The data produced by others go back several years. *There is an undeniable trend that access to NHS care is plummeting for new patients.* Here is a summary of data taken from the press:

March 2012

ITV - 27 March 2012 *Dentistry in Wales still inadequate*

<http://www.itv.com/news/wales/2012-03-27/dentists-in-wales-still-inadequate/>

The Welsh Liberal Democrat survey of all dental practices in Wales shows that only 37% are currently accepting new NHS patients. Of those practices accepting NHS patients, 63% have waiting times of more than two months long. One extreme case showed a waiting list of six years before a new NHS patient could be accepted.

The Welsh Liberal Democrat survey also revealed that:

More than half of dentists (53%) reported problems with the way the current dental contract operates. 31% believe that the contract needs to change.

It is far easier for patients to access private dentists. 70% of dentists in Wales are currently accepting new patients - almost double the number of practices accepting new NHS patients.

May 2014

BBC - 30 May 2014 NHS dentists: *Nearly half of adults have not been seen*

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-27626199>

Government figures show that 52% of adults in Wales were treated by a dentist in the 24 months before 31 December last year. Plaid Cymru said the fact that almost half of adults had not received any NHS treatment highlighted a problem with the number of available NHS dentists.

Health spokeswoman Elin Jones said: "It's obvious from the number of people who are still unable to find an NHS dentist, even for children, that we need to increase the NHS capacity even further."

Liberal Democrat assembly member, Eluned Parrott, added: "This Welsh Labour government has completely overlooked the dentistry service in Wales. Just stating that everyone should have access to a dentist isn't enough - there has to be action too."

September 2018

BBC - 27 September 2018 *NHS dental patients 'face 90-mile trip', union claims*

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45660819>

BDA figures show that on average 15% of Welsh NHS dental clinics accepted new adult patients last year, with 28% taking on new child patients.

[*Post publication note:* In Cardiff and Vale, the access is shockingly low with just 3% of practices taking on adults and 6% accepting children for NHS treatment.]

This lack of access is having significant impacts on patients. Data from NHS Direct shows people living in Aberystwyth face a near 90-mile (144km) round trip to see an NHS dental practice which is accepting new patients. People in Newtown face 80-mile (128km) journeys while those in Cardiff could travel almost 30 miles (48km).

NHS Dentistry Activity Statistics

The BDA is concerned about the way dentistry activity data are portrayed by the Government and we have already alluded to these concerns in our written evidence, including that the data are not normalized for population changes (growth).

- Over the past six years - any increase in treatment numbers has just kept pace with the increase in the population
- In six years, there has been an average increase of approx 0.5% per year of courses of treatment and patients treated
- However, increases mostly reflect the population increases
- Percentage of patients receiving NHS treatment has remained almost static: 54.2% in 2011 compared with 54.9% in 2017

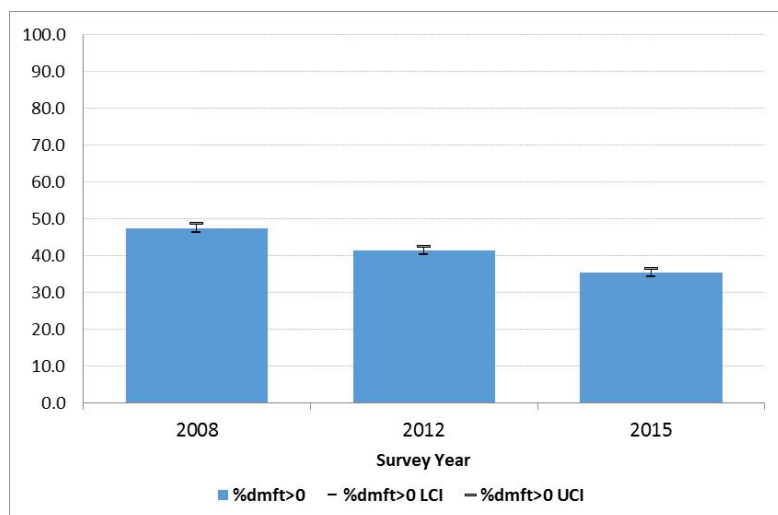
Numbers of Practices that solely conduct private work

Using figures obtained in 2017 from HIW, below, together with NHS Direct information on services provided by practices, it was calculated that there are 80 practices (18 per cent) in Wales that do only private work and do no NHS work. We believe that number is likely to grow in the next few years as more and more practices hand back their NHS contracts, assuming they do not close altogether.

Health board	Number of Practices listed by HIW
ABMU	77
Aneurin Bevan	79
Betsi Cadwaladr	90
Cardiff and Vale	74
Cwm Taf	40
Hywel Dda	48
Powys	26
All Wales	434

Designed to Smile

Welsh Government reported a 12% reduction in the level of dental decay amongst five-year old's in Wales between 2008 and 2015. That works out at 1.7% fall each year on average. The latest survey carried out in 2015 shows that on average 35% of five-year old's in Wales had dental decay.



The BDA welcomes the results and would like to see the Committee challenge the Government to top up the funding from £4m to £6m to ensure that 5 and 6-year-old children do not lose out on the fluoride varnish with the Refocus of Designed to Smile. As we said in our evidence, we welcome the extension to very young children, but fear that any advantage in the early years will be lost at the critical age when the permanent teeth erupt without the fluoride varnish to protect them. These are children who are less likely to visit a high street dentist. And given the declining access for new child patients are less likely to be successfully treated on the NHS.

These data might very well correlate with Government dentistry data showing that approximately 33% of children do not visit a General Dental Practice, which seem unnervingly close to 35% of children with decay. With new child access to NHS dentistry now falling to such low levels - particularly in Cardiff and Vale at just 6% - we are greatly concerned that children will be left with nowhere to turn to other than Accident and Emergency, their GP, or private dentistry if they are fortunate to have sufficient family income.

The BDA would like to see the government follow NICE guidelines and look to have age-appropriate programmes for older children who are still showing unacceptably high levels of dental caries. We are concerned that this idea is being actively resisted by the CDO and would suggest that NICE guidelines should be paid the attention they deserve.

References

Welsh Government April 2016 '*Children's oral health in Wales - something to smile about*'
<https://gov.wales/docs/phhs/publications/160503smileen.pdf>

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Submitted on 4 October 2018

Dr Caroline Seddon
National Director BDA Wales
Report Editor

BDA Wales has a policy of publishing key documents in Welsh and English (see our website)

<https://www.bda.org/bdawales>

The Welsh translated report to the Committee is now available on our landing page