Earl Howe takes on role as UK’s new minister for dentistry
Ministerial portfolios finalised, New government releases coalition plans

Earl Howe has been appointed as the new UK dentistry minister by the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. As the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Quality, he will also be responsible for National Health Service (NHS) Constitution, NHS Commissioning Reform, Primary Care, Medicines, Pharmacy & Industry, NICE, Research and Development, Innovation and Finance and Review of Arm’s Length Bodies.

Earl Howe has been opposition spokesman for Health and Social Services in the House of Lords since 1997. In 1995, he was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence, a post he relinquished at the 1997 General Election. Following the General Election of 1992, he was Parliamentary Secretary (Lords) at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The other members of the new ministerial health team are Paul Burstow (Liberal Democrats), as well as Simon Burns and Anne Milton (Conservatives). Ms Milton will have the responsibility for issues regarding fluoridation.

Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley said: “We have a very strong ministerial team with a wealth of experience in the field of health. Simon Burns previously served as a Health Minister as well as more recently, working on the shadow health team. Since 1999, Paul Burstow has worked on the older people’s brief and has a special interest in social care and disability issues.”

“Anne Milton, who worked for the NHS for 25 years, has a wide range of hands-on experience, including nursing in hospitals, as a district nurse, and supporting GPs and nurses working in palliative care. And Earl Howe was opposition spokesman for Health and Social Services in the House of Lords from 1997.” He added: “Together, we will build an National Health Service in which the patient shares in making decisions, where quality standards are evidence-based and form the basis of the design of services and their management, and where the objective is consistent improvement in the outcomes we achieve, so that they are amongst the best in the world. We will create a more integrated public health service at the heart of healthcare policy and we will offer support, security and services to those in need of personal and social care.”

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government have revealed their full agreement in a document entitled The Coalition: Our Programme for Government. The 50-page document summarises government policy aims across all departments, including the NHS. It says The government believes that the NHS is an important expression of our national values. We are committed to an NHS that is free at the point of use and available to everyone based on need, not the ability to pay. We want to free NHS staff from political micromanagement, increase democratic participation in the NHS and make the NHS more accountable to patients that it serves. That way we will drive up standards, support professional responsibility, deliver better value for money and create a healthier nation.

In terms of dentistry it states that We will introduce a new dentistry contract that will focus on achieving good dental health and increasing access to NHS dentistry, with additional focus on the oral health of schoolchildren.