Three cheers for Dr Crouch

An orthodontist has won a landmark victory, after taking on the Department of Health and fighting against an appeal, which would have given health bosses the right to terminate dental contracts without cause or notice.

The DH lodged the appeal earlier this year after Eddie Crouch, an orthodontist in Birmingham, won a Judicial Review, which said that primary care trusts (PCTs) were wrong to insert a clause in the NHS dental contracts allowing them to terminate the contract without cause or notice.

The DH battled it out in the High Court, saying that health bosses needed such a power.

The Court of Appeal upheld the earlier ruling that the reasons by which a PCT can end a contract are set out in legislation, and that a PCT must abide by legitimate termination reasons.

If the DH had won the appeal, primary care trusts would have had the power to end dentists’ contracts with as little as one day’s notice.

Dr Crouch said that it was ‘re-assuring’ that ‘fairness was seen to be upheld’ and said it ‘should encourage others to challenge inappropriate powers that PCTs and the Department try to influence’.

Dr Crouch was forced to rely on financial support from fellow dentists to fight the case after he failed to come to an agreement with the British Dental Association (BDA) over a confidentiality document they wanted him to sign.

‘I can never repay that, and I hope they share this victory with me, which is the victory over draconian actions of a government against health care providers’.

Peter Ward, chief executive of the BDA, called it a case with ‘potentially far-reaching and devastating consequences for the profession’. He added that the DH needed ‘to send a clear signal of support to dentists by acknowledging and accepting the ruling’.

* See page seven for the exclusive interview

Mouthwash link with cancer

Mouthwashes containing alcohol can cause oral cancer and should be removed from supermarket shelves, a dental health study claims.

The news, which was revealed as Dental Tribune was going to press reports sufficient scientific evidence that such mouthwashes contribute to an increased risk of the disease.

The ethanol in mouthwash is thought to allow cancer-causing substances to permeate the lining of the mouth.

Michael McCullough, associate professor of oral medicine at the University of Melbourne, Australia, who led the study, said: ‘We see people with oral cancer who have no other risk factors than the use of mouthwash containing alcohol, so what we’ve done is review all the evidence.’

‘Since this article, further evidence has come out, too. We believe there should be warnings. If it was a facial cream that had the effect of reducing acne but had a four to fivefold increased risk of skin cancer, no-one would be recommending it.’

Professor McCullough, chair of the Australian Dental Association’s therapeutic committee, said the alcohol in mouthwash ‘increases the permeability’ of the mucous membrane to other carcinogens, such as nicotine.

A toxic breakdown product of alcohol called acetaldehyde that may accumulate in the oral cavity

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