MPs knock independent review

MPs have criticised the independent review into NHS dentistry in England for failing to have a practising community dentist on its panel.

An independent team, to help improve access for patients who want to see a NHS dentist, was appointed in December by Health Secretary Alan Johnson.

The team led by Professor Jimmy Steele of Newcastle University is made up of Eric Roomey, consultant in Dental Public Health, Cumbria Primary Care Trust (PCT), Janet Clarke, clinical director of Salaried Dental Services, Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT and Tom Wilson, director of contracts, Milton Keynes PCT.

Mike Penning, shadow health minister, expressed his concerns during the debate over the ‘lack of engagement between ministers and the professionals’.

He also questioned why no health minister attended the British Dental Association’s (BDA) conference last year ‘to speak on behalf of the government, given that the contract is so controversial among the public as ‘he is a civil servant—he is not elected; he is appointed to date’ and set out the four criticisms that were made in the critical Health Select Committee report last summer.

In the report, it accepted that ‘progress on improving access to dental services has been disappointing to date’ and set out the aims of the independent review.

During a debate in the House of Commons, Sandra Gidley, Liberal Democrat health spokesperson, said: ‘The panel undertaking the review has been welcomed, but I note that it contains no community dentist and so some dentists will be wondering about its composition.’

She added: ‘It seems to be made up of a couple of academics, somebody who apparently wants to be the chief dental officer one day and a failed commissioner who commissioned dental services without doing a needs assessment.

‘Does that augur well for the future,’ she asked.

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