News in brief

Sadly missed
A dentist from Worcester has been killed in a motorcycle accident. Father-of-two, John Bue from the NHS Dines Green dental surgery on Gresham Road, died in Worcestershire Royal Hospital, following an accident on the A4440.

LDC chair
Mick Armstrong, a representative of the British Dental Association’s General Dental Practice Committee, has been elected as chair of the Local Dental Committees for 2010-11. He said: ‘I would like to give the annual conference a bit of life and get dentists united as much as possible under this awkward new contract.’

Free treatment
A dentist in Edinburgh is giving free dental treatment worth thousands of pounds to children affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Biju Krishnan, who runs the Scottish Dental Implant Centre in Edinburgh, has been treating the teeth of 25 Belarusian children from the town of Mogilev in Belarus. The Friends of Chernobyl’s Children organisation have brought the children over for a month’s treatment with Dr Krishnan, providing free dental examinations and treatments. He said: ‘The children can have terrible teeth because of the conditions back home – their poor diets and the poor agriculture thanks to the radiation effects – and we have to try and counter that here.’

Record deal
A singing dentist in Richmond, West London is awaiting the release of his debut album after securing a £1 million record deal with Sony/BMG. Andrew Bain, began singing in choirs at a young age, went on tour with Cameron Mackintosh’s production of Les Miserables in 1999 and Bill Kenwright’s Whistle Down the Wind in 2002 and signed his million pound contract last July. He currently works two days a week at the Park Dental Clinic in Upper Richmond Road West. To see him in action, visit www.dental-tribune.co.uk

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Canal anatomy
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Performing dentistry
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First impressions
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Review links pay to patient numbers
Professor Jimmy Steele, author of the report wants to see dentists ‘more explicitly accountable’ for providing high-quality and long-lasting treatments (eg, fillings and root canals). He also wants to see more of a focus on prevention with dentists taking the time to advise patients on preventive care.

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The average lifespan of those affected by the disaster is 50 years old.

The long-awaited independent review into NHS dentistry wants dentists’ pay linked to the number of patients they see. A ‘shameful’ lack of IT investment and patient confusion over what the NHS actually offers in terms of dentistry are revealed in Jimmy Steele’s review.

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The BDA has urged the Government to heed the report’s recommendations to pilot properly any reforms it introduces as a result of this report.

Professor Steele said: ‘This review is a vision of a better deal for both patients and dentists. It’s about making sure that patients can see an NHS dentist who will take long-term responsibility for their care.

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Lack of IT funding ‘quite shameful’

Professor Jimmy Steele, who led the independent review into NHS dentistry, has called the lack of IT investment into dentistry ‘quite shameful’.

Professor Steele, who has been carrying out research into the state of NHS dentistry over the last six months, spoke about his findings at the annual conference of Local Dental Committees in London, prior to the publication of the report.

He revealed that a big reason he took on the task given to him by the Government was that he was ‘very concerned’ about the state of NHS dentistry.

He revealed that researching ‘The Independent Review of NHS Dental Services’ has been difficult and he has had to deal ‘over the last six months with some very conflicting viewpoints’.

‘I have had to deal with a profession that is hostile to the reforms and you cannot have a good dental service if you don’t have happy dentists.

I was also dealing with an NHS that was telling me that more money had been put into it but there are fewer patients being treated.

I felt like a man on a tightrope trying to keep my balance and trying to keep my balance for. Of course I recognise that there are priorities for the NHS as there is a fixed pot of money and we have spent a lot of time thinking about these priorities,’ he said.

Professor Steele did have praise for NHS dental care and said: ‘There are many patients who are receiving outstanding care from the NHS and it is excellent value for money. I would rather have the NHS dental care in this country than quite a lot of the care that is being provided in the developed world.

However, on the negative side, he found that ‘some patients are not able to access care and added: ‘I am really concerned that some of the best dentists are unable to provide the best care they want to provide.

He also expressed concern about the ‘highly variable commissioning’ that takes place now it is all done at a local level and said: ‘There needs to be more robust performance management from the PCTs and better coordination of information and better data and improved use of data.

One of the core reforms of the 2006 contract was the move to local commissioning.

So one of the real issues, since it came in, has been the competence of the PCTs.

‘Where it is done well, you have the local dental committee, commissioners and chief executives fully engaged in the process,’ he said.

He also dealt with the problem of UDA’s (units of dental activity) and said: ‘There is unrealistic remuneration for certain procedures and to have the UDA as a sole measure of payment is wrong’.

Another problem with the current contract is that the NHS offer is unclear ‘so patients are confused about charges and what treatments are available on the NHS.

He also feels there is a problem with the image of dentists and called them ‘fairly unpopular’, second on people’s dislike list only to lawyers and politicians.

To reverse this trend, there needs to be ‘high level support for dentistry’ and from all political parties and said: ‘That commitment is really important’.

Patients are confused about NHS charges and treatments.

Dentists call for consistency

Dentists at the Local Dental Committees’ conference have called for a back-to-basics contract and called for more consistency from primary care trusts. They also held a vigorous debate on whether the Government should fund the General Dental Council (GDC).

Alasdair McKendrick of Northamptonshire LDC, claimed dentists will no longer be regulating themselves from this October, as there will be more lay members on the GDC than dentists.

The Council currently has 29 council members — 10 are members of the public appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission, 12 are dental professionals (15 dentists and four dental hygienists and therapists) elected by dental professionals. Under the restructure in October, there will be 12 lay members, eight dentists and four dental care professionals (dental hygienists, dental therapists, dental nurses, dental technicians, orthodontic therapists, clinical dental technicians). A chair will be elected from within the membership of Council (dental professional or lay).

John Milne, chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee

However, Jason Stokes for Norfolk, LDC argued that although he didn’t like the structure of the GDC, its role is to protect the patient and therefore it needs lay members on the panel.

‘I don’t want to be regulated by the Government. At the moment it is still our regulatory body,’ he said.

John Milne, chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee, speaking on the contentious subject of UDA’s (units of dental activity) said: ‘You all know they are corrosive and we need to be rid of them or, if not, see them lose some of their power’.

He also referred to the relationship between dentists and primary care trusts (PCTs) and said: ‘A good relationship between the Local Dental Committees and the PCTs needs to exist.

Ian Gordon, an LDC representative from Tees put many of the problems of the new contract at the door of the PCTs. He said: ‘It didn’t help that the PCTs were in an embryonic stage when the new contract was brought in. But also I find that you go to all that effort building up a good relationship with it and the PCTs then, if you have been dealing with moves on and you have to start all over again.’

There was also a call for all PCTs to be consistent within a Strategic Health Authority region in their policies towards UDA’s (units of dental activity) achievement.