Call me Dr, Dentist Dr

British Dental Association survey results show overwhelming clinician support for use of the courtesy title Dr

Four-fifths of dentists think it is appropriate to continue to use the courtesy title of ‘Dr’ according to a poll carried out by the British Dental Association (BDA). The survey, which was carried out as part of a discussion hosted on the communities section of the BDA website between late July and early September, attracted high levels of interest, being viewed more than 2,800 times.

The results of the poll will be used to emphasise the profession’s concerns in the BDA’s formal response to the General Dental Council’s consultation on the issue.

“This issue has generated unprecedented levels of interest from contributors to the BDA’s online communities. Participants have sent a very strong signal about their wish to continue using the title Dr. We have listened to them and convey the strength of their wish and provided that it is not fused by the use of the title. The practice of referring to dentists in this way is long-established overseas and is also now firmly embedded in the UK.”

However, the call has sparked a row with medical doctors who have object to the title, as dentists could mislead patients about the extent of their expertise. As was witnessed earlier this month, a dentist was ordered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to remove the title of ‘Dr’ from their name as they failed to have a medical qualification or a PhD.

Even so, dentists from around the country still insist that the use of the term ‘Dr’ would not confuse patients, implying that it would actually bring Britain in line with the rest of Europe, where the title is commonplace.

“We believe that dentists should be permitted to use the courtesy title ‘Dr’ should they wish and provided that it is not fused by the use of the term, to protect patient safety. “Patients have a right to clarity and to be secure in the knowledge that the person treating them is competent and qualified to do so,” he said.

While dentists are not prohibited entirely from calling themselves Dr, the ASA says that to do so without also making it obvious that they are not doctors is a clear breach of advertising laws.

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: “The title of “Doctor” is not a protected title, so you don’t have to be a medical practitioner to use it.”

He added, however, that there was a provision in the Dentists Act 1984, which prevented dentists from using any title or description to suggest a qualification that they did not possess; however, he said that it was up to the General Dental Council to enforce that rule.