The scent of lavender calms patients’ nerves at the dentist, claims a study which will be presented at the British Psychological Society’s health psychology conference at Bath University. Researchers from King’s College London used a questionnaire to measure the anxiety levels of more than 500 patients in dental waiting rooms over a month, where 50 per cent were exposed to the scent. The anxiety level of those not exposed to lavender was 10.7 compared with 7.4 among those smelling it, regardless of the type of dental appointment anticipated. Lavender essential oil reputedly has a calming effect and is often used in massage and bath oils. It is said to help in treating migraine, headaches and anxiety and is a good remedy for insect bites. However, the study did not observe that smelling the oil will decrease anxiety in patients when they were thinking about future dental appointments.

A national survey has reported that men from Leeds regard themselves as having some of the most discoloured teeth anywhere in the UK. The dental health questionnaire showed that men in the North- ern city assessed their teeth as being the least white in the country. Every male participant from the city who took part in the survey confessed that they would like much whiter teeth and on average they gave their set of teeth, marks of four out of 10.

A series of dental roadshows on the implementation of the new contract has launched around the UK. They were half day events involving local dental committees and dental practice advisers. The first one kicked off in London on Friday, September 19. Three others are set to take place around the country in Taunton, Nottingham and Leeds. Chief Government dental officer, Dr Barry Cockcroft said: ‘The aim of these roadshows is to enable us to draw together different strands of the profession, including dental care professionals engaged in the day-to-day treatment of patients as well as people involved in academia and regulation. According to the letter, the body was able to anticipate developments in the sector and produce balanced, strategic thought, together with informed advice. Dr Sanderson added: ‘Even though in its response to the consultation, the Department of Health (DH) noted that ministers would still get independent and impartial advice, none of the bodies which it has listed are directly linked with day-to-day providers of dental care to patients.’

He said the Secretary of State is going to reply to the statement from the BDA.

The Standing Dental Advisory Committee was established in the NHS Act 1946 and set up in 1949 as one of nine bodies to advise on matters relating to services provided under the act. The remit of the committee is to advise the Secretary of State on matters relating to the services with which the committee is concerned, as it sees fit, as well as questions referred to them by the Secretary of State.

The DH has made increasing use of subject-specific committees and members of the National Committee for Health and Clinical Excellence, (NICE) to obtain clinical advice about dentistry.

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Lavender heals

The British Dental Association (BDA) has written to the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson urging him to reconsider the decision to abolish the Standing Dental Advisory Committee (SDAC).

The letter from the BDA’s chair of the executive board sent earlier this month, voices the association’s ‘deep concern at the decision, particularly in light of overwhelming support for the continuation and strengthening of the committee in responses to the consultation on the issue’.

Susie Sanderson said: ‘We believe the decision to abolish the SDAC to be a misguided one that goes against a strong consensus of opinion across different branches of the profession. The committee offered an effective method of canvassing the whole spectrum of the profession including those on the frontline of patient care. One of the key principles of the NHS Next Stage Review is the promotion of a quality service developed with full professional engagement. This decision appears to be contrary to that principle. We urge the Secretary of State to reconsider the decision and guarantee the future of a committee which is an invaluable source of expert consensus in dentistry.’

Dr Sanderson added that the SDAC, with its professional authority and strong links to hands-on patient care, was very much in line with the principle of providing a quality dental service with full professional engagement and would make an invaluable contribution to discussions and planning about the future of NHS dentistry.

On the SDAC’s future, the consultation document states that because ad hoc committees are time-limited and subject specific, they make fewer demands than standing committees, from both expert members and the secretarial staff who support them.

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Dental roadshows

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Drop-ins for fluoridation consultation

Residents and workers in those areas of Southamp-
ton which might receive fluoridated water can attend a series of drop-in events during the public consultation period. The sessions are organised by South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and began in Bitterne on Thursday, September 18. Interested parties are invited to talk to experts and give feedback on the contentious proposal. There are display boards with detailed information, as well as the consultation documents and other explanatory literature.

The SHA claims it is independently overseeing the consultation to help people understand the arguments for and against fluoridation. However, anti-fluoride campaigners are not allowed to give their own presentations at the sessions leading to claims of bias against the health authority.

Chairman of Hampshire against Fluoridation John Spoffittswoode said the outright refusal by the SHA to let his organisation make their own presentations at the drop-in events gave weight to the notion that the consultation was a 'sham'.

He said the material produced to date by the health authorities was one-sided and gave a false picture about the true effects of fluoride. It did not take into account other research which showed that fluoride could cause serious and negative side-effects on health.

Dental crisis in Lincoln improves

All patients living within a 20-mile radius of Lincoln can now be seen by an NHS dentist, according to the county’s dental service. Since the new contracts were introduced in April 2006, 60,000 county patients have registered with an NHS dentist with new practices recently opening in South Kesteven and North Kesteven. The only areas in which the waiting lists still need to be reduced are Louth and Melalethorpe.

Before the Government introduced the new NHS dental contract in April 2006 when local PCTs began to control dental provision, the NHS Information Centre are set to reveal that on average an NHS dentist earns a six-figure salary. The figures show that dentists across the UK received a 15 per cent pay increase last year, with an overall income of more than £100,000 in 2006-07, an increase of 15 per cent.

Fears have been expressed by patients groups that the new contract encourages NHS dentists to carry out simple work at the expense of more complex treatment, because payment is the same for both.

They believe the target-based contracts encourage profits rather than patient-centred care and it is easier and quicker to take out a tooth than do painstaking root canal surgery.

The working hours of an average NHS dentist, who spends about 20 per cent of each week doing NHS work, has only increased by half an hour a week, to 57 hours.

The number of people seen by NHS dental practices has dropped by about one million since the contract was introduced.

In July, the Commons Select Committee on Health said that the Department of Health (DoH) had gone back on its words by not bringing about improved access to dentists, because the amount of complex treatments such as crowns, bridges and dentures had fallen by 57 per cent since the contract’s introduction. The number of root canal treatments fell by 45 per cent in England and Wales, although it rose in Scotland, where the contract was not brought in. There has been widespread criticism that the scheme was inadequately piloted before being introduced.

Six figure salaries for dentists revealed