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News in brief

Book auction
One of the first books on dentistry, written by King George III’s dentist, is up for auction. Thomas Berdmore, wrote the book A Treatise on the Diseases and Deformities of the Teeth and Gums and the Most Rational Methods of Treating Them in 1779. It is bound in its original calf skin and is being auctioned in Derby. It is expected to fetch £500. It contains advice such as straightening teeth using gold wire. If that fails, the alternative was ‘to break the teeth into order by means of a strong pair of crooked piers’. Children with milk teeth are told in the book to ‘chew upon coral, wax and suchlike bodies’ to prevent decay.

MBE award
A dentist in South Tyneside has been awarded an MBE for his ‘services to NHS dentistry’. Matthew Gill, a partner at Dean Road Dental Practice, was presented with an MBE by Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace in London.

Super surgery
The first super surgery housing dental and maternity services under the same roof as traditional family doctors has opened in England. Health Secretary Alan Johnson officially opened the first one stop GP-led health centre in West Yorkshire. The Hillside Bridge Health Care Centre in Bradford, West Yorkshire, is the first of 152 new ‘super surgeries’ – one for every primary care trust in England.

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

BDA fights the good fight

 Dentists up and down the country are eagerly waiting to see if the High Court is going to rule in favour of an appeal by the British Dental Association, that gives health bosses the right to terminate dental contracts without cause or notice.

The DH has challenged the appeal. ‘This appeal will come to an end tomorrow, just because we feel like it’, said HRH Prince Charles.

The DH is battling it out in the High Court, against the British Dental Association (BDA) which is backing Dr Eddie Crouch, as Dental Tribune went to press.

A spokesman for the BDA said: ‘The judge has retired to make his decision. We have no idea yet as to when this is going to be.’

If the DH wins the appeal, PCTs would have the power to end dentists’ contracts with as little as one day’s notice.

The court judgment will apply to all practitioners.

The BDA has challenged the legal appeal saying such notice clauses are unlawful and unreasonable.

Back in April 2006, South Birmingham Primary Care Trust included a without grounds termination clause in Dr Crouch’s contract.

Dr Crouch contested the contract offered to him but signed it in December in order to continue to provide NHS care to his patients.

He said the DH appeal ‘must send shivers down the backs of all practitioners’.

‘Botched’ reforms fail 1.2m people

More than 1.2m fewer people saw an NHS dentist in the two years up to June this year than in the last two years under the old dental contract, according to figures from the NHS Information Centre.

However the data also shows that NHS dentists are carrying out more treatments for the patient they do see, with a rise of 1.4 per cent compared by the Information Centre.

The report, NHS Dental Statistics for England: Quarter 1, 30 June 2008, shows that in the two years up to the end of June 2008, 28.8m people - which equates to 52.7 per cent of the population, saw an NHS dentist.

The percentage of people seen by an NHS dentist varied from area to area with a higher percentage of people tending to see an NHS dentist in northern strategic health authority (SHA) areas compared with those in the south of England.
The ‘bolched contract’ is forcing dentists to give back £120m to the NHS because all targets agreed with local health authorities have fallen short of the targets and will have to be repaid money back to their local health authority.

The British Dental Association fears these cashbacks may put some practices out of business and could lead to more dentists quitting the NHS.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by DSACU, provider of dental insurance that supports practices in other parts of the country, show that 90 percent of primary care trusts responded to a survey that found a total of 44 contracts where targets were missed by $50,000 or more.

Peter Ward, the chief executive of the BDA, said that dentists who failed to meet their targets in the first year were likely to have failed to do so again last year, creating a ‘roll-over effect’.

He said: ‘Once again this highlights problems with a target-driven contract that contains one crude measure of performance, which has long been critiqued by the profession and patient representative groups.’

Quentin Skinner, the chairman of the BDA, said: ‘For those dentists who fell rather short of the mark, the future for them in the NHS certainly looks bleak.’

Mike Penning, Shadow Health Minister, said: ‘These figures show, yet again, why we need to rip up Labour’s bolched contract and move towards a registration system based on clinical need, one that prevents doctors and dentists from perpetuating dental ill health rather than reacting to it.’ The BDA requested an amnesty for dentists who had completed a significant amount — but not all — of their units of dental activity (UDA) for 2006/07.

However the Department of Health has said it will not consider waiving financial clawbacks for dentists.