

# Dentistry

## Introduction

According to the most recent Assembly Government bulletin<sup>i</sup>, 55 per cent of the population were treated by an NHS dentist during the 24 months leading up to December 2006. NHS dentistry and the services provided therefore are important to the Assembly Government's strategic health goals of maintaining and building a healthy nation. Recent scientific research has shown a link between poor oral health and other conditions such as heart and lung disease<sup>ii</sup>. Prevention and oral health promotion are part of the Assembly Government's 10 year health strategy outlined in *Designed for Life*<sup>iii</sup>.

The bulk of NHS dentistry takes place within the primary care sector, i.e. in "high street" dental surgeries with some provision made by the Community Dental Service and hospital (secondary care) service. In addition there are prevention and promotion (oral health) initiatives. However, around a quarter of people in Wales receive dental treatment through private providers and although this can be a matter of choice made by both dentists and patients, obtaining access to an NHS dentist is a key issue, not only in Wales but throughout the UK.

An important change in NHS dentistry affecting both health professionals and patients and aimed at improving access, commenced on 1 April 2006 with the introduction of a new General Dental Services (GDS) contract (a pilot Personal Dental Services (PDS) agreement had been started earlier in 2005 with an interim contract until 1 April 2006). The new contract brought about changes in the way dentists are paid, how patients access dentists, the cost of services to patients, and the way in which dental activity is monitored and reported. Key changes are:

- New ways in which dental activity is calculated, i.e. through Units of Dental Activity (UDAs), with targets set in advance and payments to dentists based on these spread throughout the year;
- Three charge bands for patients (*see Regulations or NHS Direct overleaf for details*);
- No registration of patients, although dentists may keep a list if they wish;
- New registration classification for dentists with principal dentists who own a business being classed as "providers" and all dentists, dental associates, trainees and dental workers classed as "performers";

The Community Dental Service (CDS), which is run by NHS Trusts. It is currently undergoing reorganisation into a regional service, provides services for vulnerable groups, and for school children who are seen 3 times during their schooling. Since 2001, a fissure sealant programme for children in deprived areas has been taking place under the Inequalities in Health Fund.

The commissioning of services for dentistry is the responsibility of Local Health Boards (LHBs) who do so according to the needs of their populations. The National Public Health Service (Wales) has a role in providing specialist dental public health advice and leadership on oral health, dental services and dental policy and strategy.

The amount of money allocated by the Assembly Government to dentistry rose from £77 million in 2003-04 to £121 million in 2006-07.

## Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

Dental policy and services are devolved and covered in Field 9, "Health and Health Services", of Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over dental matters through Legislative Competence Orders. Matters concerning professional conduct of dentists and training content for professional qualifications are matters for the General Dental Council. There is, however, a Welsh Committee for Vocational Training<sup>iv</sup>.

In November 2006, the National Assembly voted on a motion to support legislation to provide for the inspection of private dental practices in Wales by Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW).

Wales has made its own regulations in relation to the new GDS contract, the interim PDS contract and dental charge band costs which are lower in Wales than in England<sup>v</sup>.

## Dental health and activity statistics

Official statistics on numbers of residents using private dentistry services are not currently collected and since April 2006, numbers of residents using the NHS are no longer collected because of past difficulties experienced with recording individuals as opposed to episodes. Statistics on dental health are drawn from surveys with the *Children's*

*Dental Health in Wales 2003*<sup>vi</sup>, for example, reporting that 52 per cent of five year olds and 71 per cent of eight year olds showed signs of decay in the primary teeth. The mean number of teeth with decay for both five and eight year olds was lower in North Wales (1.5 and 2.3) than in either south east (2.1 and 2.4) or mid and west Wales (2.1 and 2.7). For adults, the *Welsh Health Survey, 2004/05*, reported that 67 per cent had used an NHS dentist during the past twelve months.

During 2005-06, the Community Dental Service<sup>vii</sup>, which includes school dental services, saw nearly 76,000 people (first contacts) and nearly 203,000 total contacts. Just over 29,000 children were screened by the CDS in Wales during 2005-06, representing 93 per cent of the total people screened.

Since 1 April 2006, statistical bulletins on NHS dental activity have been produced quarterly by the Statistical Directorate, the first of which is informative in describing the changes in statistics<sup>viii</sup>.

The latest published bulletin, for October to December 2006 shows that there were 1,150 dentist performers on open NHS contracts (performers), of which, about 1 in 9 work for the CDS. There are 3.9 dentists per 10,000 population.

## Key Welsh Government strategy documents and action plans from the Second Assembly

- Welsh Assembly Government, *Routes to Reform – a strategy for primary dental care in Wales*, September 2002 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/dent-strat-e.pdf>
- Welsh Assembly Government, *Response to Bridges to the Future* – (creating a regional structure to the future organisation of Community Dental Services in Wales). Consultation closed December 2005 <http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/40382311111/professionals/cdo/bridge-future-response-e?lang=en>

## Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

There are no dentistry legacy issues from the Health and Social Services Committee. However, the financial and other performance results of the first year of the new dental contract will be available in June/July 2007 and this may initiate issues for scrutiny.

## Useful Links

Welsh Assembly Government Chief Dental Officer,

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/professionals/dental/?lang=en>

2. National Public Health Service (Wales) <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=719&pid=22915>

3. British Dental Association Cymru, <http://www.bda.org/about/offices.cfm?ContentID=182>

4. General Dental Council, <http://www.gdc-uk.org/>

5. NHS Direct Wales,

<http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/small/en/home/localservices/dentistsinformationandlinks>

## Further information

For further information about the dentistry please contact: Carolyn Eason, Members' Research Service ([Caroyn.Eason@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Caroyn.Eason@wales.gsi.gov.uk)), 029 2089 8917

<sup>i</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Statistical Directorate, *NHS Dental Services, October to December 2006*, SD037/2007, 23 March, 2007 <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health-2007/hdw20070323/?lang=en>

<sup>ii</sup> British Dental Health Foundation, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.dentalhealth.org.uk/faqs/leafletdetail.php?LeafletID=49>

<sup>iii</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Designed for Life*, May 2005, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/designed-for-life-e.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Committee for Vocational Training for Wales, <http://www.dentpostgradwales.ac.uk/cvtw/>

<sup>v</sup> *The National Health Service (General Dental Services Contracts) (Wales) Regulations 2006* 28 February 2006,

<http://www.hmsso.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2006/20060490e.htm#28212>; *The National Health Service (Personal Dental Services Agreements) (Wales) Regulations 2006*, 28 February, 2006 <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2006/20060489e.htm>; The National Health Service (General Dental Services Contracts and Personal Dental Services Agreements) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2006, 29 March 2006 <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2006/20060947e.htm>; *The National Health Service (Dental Charges) (Wales) Regulations 2006*, 28 February 2006, <https://www.hmsso.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2006/20060491e.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> National Statistics, *Children's Dental Health in Wales 2003*,

[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CHILDREN/dentalhealth/downloads/cdh\\_Wales.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CHILDREN/dentalhealth/downloads/cdh_Wales.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Statistical Directorate, *Community Dental Services in Wales*, 2004-05, 12 December 2006.

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/40382313/statistics/health/health-2006/sdr171-2006.pdf?lang=en>

<sup>viii</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Statistical Directorate, *NHS Dental Services, April to June 2006*, SD121/2006, 9 October 2006

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health-2007/health-2006/hdw20061009/?lang=en>