

LDC Conference 2023

LDC Conference was held this year in Harrogate on the 8th and 9th June.

There follow a few notes made on those days.

Shawn Charlwood - GDPC Chair

Shawn gave an update on the state of play on interactions with the government. As usual it was not good news.

The mentality of the government was summed up by the phrase 'Crisis? What crisis?'

The PM had said that dentistry was going in the right direction and that reforms were delivering the goods. However, even the press and a growing number of politicians were beginning to see through this bluster.

The myth of reforms increasing access were shown to be false. We were seeing the return of queues for NHS treatment as 90% of practices were unable to see new NHS patients. Capacity was light years away from pre-Covid levels.

The myth of fair funding and record investment is sheer fantasy. Increases in patient charges are being used to cover costs and this will not work. Improvements cannot happen without fair funding.

There has been no 'bounce' from the recent so called reforms. There has been a fall in the dental workforce the extent of which has not been seen since 2012/13. 1100 dentists have been lost to the NHS since lockdown and only 86% of contracted UDAs have been delivered.

We need a rescue plan and the government needs to show commitment to dentistry. A better UDA rate transmits to better access.

Dentistry will be a major issue for the next general election and GDPC will be maximising pressure on the interested parties.

NHS dentistry is 75 years old this year and it is easier to write a eulogy than it is to write an anniversary celebration.

The ultimate fate of NHS dentistry rests with the government and not with us.

Rachel Maskell MP (Lab York Central)

This opposition MP said that the dental service was massively underfunded and needed an extra £1.5bn to recover.

There had been an 8.5% increase in patient charges but there was a worrying lack of data on dentist numbers and workforce behaviour.

The Health Select Committee report was due to be published next month but we should try to sling out UDAs and move to a flexible commissioning system.

The Hall gave thanks to a politician who had the nerve to come along in person to address Conference, something sadly lacking in recent years. It was nice to hear from a politician who seemed to understand dentistry.

However, although she spoke well, she was unable to offer any concrete policy or proposals that might be introduced by a future Labour administration.

Lord Toby Harris - GDC Chair

The Dental Leadership Network was being introduced as an attempt to allow more interaction between the GDC and its stakeholders. We may not always agree, but an exchange of opinions and collaboration is important.

Workforce data was woefully inadequate and GDC could be in a position to collate such information when the annual fee was collected. This process would require co-operation from the profession and from BDA.

There was an aim to try and reduce the impact on individuals facing FtP investigations. FtP would only be instigated for 'more serious' cases.

Attempts were also being made to make it easier for re-registration when the annual fee was late. A letter confirming that CPD requirements had been met was now acceptable rather than having to produce copies of individual certificates.

Sara Hurley - CDO

The soon to be ex-CDO spoke of a need to expand the changes in Band 2 courses of treatment. It should be easier to carry out phased treatments, where a claim could be made for an initial treatment and assessment before moving on to the actual treatment. Less than 1% of claims were currently like this and it should be more like 6-8%.

Evidence from all aspects of the profession had been made available to the Minister in order to bring forward a 'Dental Plan'.

ICSs had been told to spend money allocated for dentistry actually on dentistry in 2023/4. Dentistry desperately needed a seat at the ICS table.

The CDO was very upbeat about her achievements during her term of office, something that could perhaps be open to debate

A total of 35 motions were debated at Conference. 29 were passed and 6 defeated. Details of individual motions can be found on the LDC Conference website.