

NEWS

Confrontation and complaints from patients top early career dentist worries

One in four young dentists in the UK say they worry most about receiving complaints from patients following treatment, and almost one in five worry most about confrontation and disagreements during treatment, according to a Dental Protection survey.

In the snapshot survey of dentists who qualified in the last five years, more than two in five also say they worry most about making mistakes.

The top 10 worries for early career dentists are:

1. Making a mistake – 42%
2. Complaints directly from patients after treatment – 25%
3. Confrontation or disagreements with patients during treatment – 17%
4. The impact of COVID-19 on financial security – 17%
5. The impact of COVID-19 on their mental wellbeing – 16%
6. Their career choice – 16%
7. A clinical negligence claim being brought against them – 14%
8. A GDC investigation into their practise – 13%
9. Negative media coverage or reputational damage following a case or claim – 9%
10. Disagreements with colleagues – 8%.

George Wright, Deputy Dental Director at Dental Protection commented: ‘The chief concern for early career dentists is a fear of making mistakes and this is understandable. This has and always will be at the top of the list of worries as nobody wants to feel responsible for causing harm to a patient. It is also not surprising to see patient complaints and confrontation so high on the list. The restrictions affecting access to routine dental care during the pandemic, and the resulting treatment backlog, are still impacting some dental professionals

and there are of course a number of other factors affecting access to care including lack of NHS funding and practices being dis-incentivised from taking on new high needs patients.

‘Handling complaints after treatment or disagreements during treatment can be extremely challenging for any dental professional, however we understand that for those starting out in dentistry the ongoing ‘firefighting’ reality may be particularly stressful.

‘We support members in handling complaints and difficult interactions with patients’ day in day out and know it is unpleasant. Now more than ever, early career dentists need to be confident in handling situations effectively to help avoid them escalating. This makes skills like expectation management, good communication, detailed record-keeping and establishing clear consent critical.’

BFS welcomes new public opinion survey supporting water fluoridation in Scotland

The British Fluoridation Society (BFS) welcomes the findings of its latest academic survey which confirms public support in Scotland for water fluoridation to improve oral health and combat dental health inequalities.

Today, no-one in Scotland benefits from artificial water fluoridation and there have been no recent reports published about public opinion on the issue.

Published in the *BDJ*, the new report contains the results of a robust public opinion survey on community water fluoridation to address this absence.¹

The survey set out to gauge public attitudes in three urban areas of Scotland to determine respondents’ sources of information,

awareness of the current fluoridation status of their local water supply and attitude to community water fluoridation. It was conducted using a face-to-face interview with 410 people of mixed ages and gender.

Colwyn Jones, honorary senior lecturer at Edinburgh University, an executive member of the British Fluoridation Society and lead author of the report, said: ‘The results demonstrate few people have heard recent news about water fluoridation, a minority of people believe they already have fluoridated water, and as in the rest of the UK, the majority of the Scottish population support community water fluoridation.

‘Fluoride occurs naturally and on The Scottish Water website, I discovered that my home water supply, along with about 500,000 Edinburgh residents, is shared with the Scottish (Holyrood) Parliament. Last year it had a mean level of 0.12ppm fluoride. This natural level of the mineral fluoride, shared by Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) would need to be increased by a factor of around nine, to reduce tooth decay.

‘However, owing not to dithering, but deliberate government inaction, no one

benefits from water fluoridation in Scotland. The 2018 Scottish Oral Health Improvement Plan stated, ‘Although we recognise that water fluoridation could make a positive contribution to improvements in oral health, the practicalities of implementing this means we have taken the view that alternative solutions are more achievable.’ We belatedly await publication of these ‘alternative solutions.’

Barry Cockcroft, former Chief Dental Officer for England and chair of the British Fluoridation Society added: ‘Scotland was once a pioneer in trying to implement water fluoridation schemes, unfortunately none were achieved. We hope that policy makers north of the border will now renew their efforts to introduce one of the best interventions to improve oral health now they know how out of step they have been with public opinion; it is telling that a considerable proportion of Scottish residents assumed this had all been done many years ago.’

Reference

1. Jones C, Lowry R J and Brophy R. Public attitudes to water fluoridation in Scotland. *Br Dent J* 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-022-4506-1>.

