

Still no sign of big package

Following comments from Minister Andrea Leadsom that a ‘big package of change’ is coming for NHS dentistry, the British Dental Association (BDA) warned on 23 January there is still no sign the Government has any intention of taking action that will boost access and halt the exodus from the workforce.

The Government has repeatedly stated that ‘NHS dentistry should be accessible and available for all those who need it’. However, a Recovery Plan pledged last Spring remains undelivered, and the Government has rejected the key recommendation from the

Health and Social Care Committee – to make a clean break from the discredited contract fuelling the exodus from the workforce.

The Nuffield Trust warned last month the service faces the gravest crisis in its 75-year history, and universal access to care may be dead without radical reform and investment.¹

News follows recent reports of a surge in deaths from dental sepsis, fuelled by ongoing access problems. One clinician in the North of England reportedly described their local hospital in *The Mirror* as ‘like a battlefield’ given the volume of cases.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: ‘The Government says there’s going to be a “big package” for NHS dentistry. Size really doesn’t matter if the package is empty.

‘Ministers keep offering big ambitions but have not set out any concrete plans capable of achieving them.’

References

1. Williams W, Fisher E, Edwards N. Bold action or slow decay? The state of NHS dentistry and future policy actions. Policy briefing, Nuffield Trust, 2023. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/bold-action-or-slow-decay-the-state-of-nhs-dentistry-and-future-policy-actions> (accessed January 2024). ✦

Supervised toothbrushing toolkit to tackle tooth decay in children

A new toolkit to increase supervised toothbrushing for younger children aims to address health inequalities caused by tooth decay.

Researchers from the University of Sheffield, University of Leeds and Bradford Improvement Academy have developed free online resources for NHS organisations, local government, schools, nurseries and parents, as part of the BRUSH project to better support existing and new toothbrushing programmes.¹

A quarter of five-year-olds in England have tooth decay; this can rise up to 50% in deprived areas of the country. The burden of tooth decay is significant, causing pain, as well as affecting what children eat, their speech, sleep, quality of life and attendance at nursery or school.

Treatment of decay is the most common reason why young children are admitted to hospital (33,000 each year), costing the NHS over £50 million annually.

Co-lead of the study, Professor Zoe Marshman, Professor in Dental Public Health at the University of Sheffield, said: ‘One of the key ways to prevent tooth decay is toothbrushing with a fluoride toothpaste. Toothbrushing programmes in nurseries and early years at school are really important to complement toothbrushing at home.

‘We already know supervised toothbrushing programmes for young children are effective in reducing tooth decay, and easy for nurseries/schools to run. However, the uptake and maintenance of these programmes has been fragmented.

‘The new toolkit will make it easier for new toothbrushing programmes to be set up, meaning more children will be able to benefit from the programmes so less children suffer from tooth decay and its consequences.’

The BRUSH project was funded and supported by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South West Peninsula (PenARC) and conducted by researchers from the University of Sheffield and University of Leeds. The researchers worked with NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Yorkshire and Humber to understand how best to implement and evaluate supervised toothbrushing programmes.

Co-lead of the BRUSH study, Dr Kara Gray-Burrows Lecturer in Behavioural Science & Complex Intervention Methodology at the University of Leeds, said: ‘We know that there’s good practice and excellent resources out there, so our project was about bringing together all that’s already good and seeing what gaps there were.

‘The toolkit is a central one-stop-shop sharing best practice and containing new materials we have developed to give organisations setting up these programmes, nurseries, schools, parents and children the relevant information and resources easily.’

Professor Claire Stevens CBE, Spokesperson from The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry, said: ‘BSPD welcomes the BRUSH initiative. We know that a targeted supervised toothbrushing approach is one of the priority solutions to tackling the oral health inequalities in our society. The fact that BRUSH will provide a new

free access-to-all toolkit to help facilitate supervised toothbrushing will go a long way to making this simple but highly effective intervention get traction. It will improve young children’s oral health in the short-term, whilst setting them on the path to a lifetime of good oral care practice for life.

‘Whilst BSPD believes that every child should have a “dental home” – an ongoing and preventively focused relationship with an NHS dentist – with children’s dental services in crisis, we urgently need to take a creative approach to address the persistent and immoral inequalities we see in children’s oral health. BRUSH provides a wonderful toolkit that will help everyone showing children how to clean their teeth.’

Hayden Ridsdale, Strategy and Transformation Programme Manager, NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, said: ‘As a commissioner of dental services in West Yorkshire I think the BRUSH toolkit is a fantastic resource to enable the implementation of supervised toothbrushing schemes. In West Yorkshire we’ve embedded it into our contracts with our five local authority partners to ensure good practice guides service delivery.’

For more information about the BRUSH study or to download the free resources visit: <https://www.supervisedtoothbrushing.com/>.

References

1. NIHR. BRUSH (optimising toothbrushing programmes in nurseries and schools). Available at: <https://arc-swp.nihr.ac.uk/research/projects/brush/> (accessed January 2024). ✦