

GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY DIRECTORATE



To: All NI General Dental Practitioners
BY EMAIL

General Healthcare Policy
Directorate
Room C3.27
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SQ

Email:
gdoscorrespondence@health-ni.gov.uk

Date: 23 February 2022

GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES UPDATE

Covid 19 Financial Support

As you will be acutely aware, since the outset of the pandemic, there has been a significant effort made right across the HSC to maintain access to care and ensure that patients are receiving the best service possible. This has involved significant dedication and commitment from all those dental teams who have been putting their Health Service patients' needs first, and considerable and unprecedented investment by the Department in support.

Whilst the impact of the pandemic is still being felt, there has been marked progress and the volume of services provided to patients in recent months has increased. We want to ensure that this progress continues with more Health Service patients being able to receive routine care alongside the urgent and emergency care already being provided.

As you know, the existing Financial Support Scheme (FSS) will be in place until 7 April 2022. However Minister has agreed that changes are needed to ensure that any future investment is based on current activity, rather than the historical activity of 2019/20 that has been a feature of the FSS to date.

The full details of a new support scheme are being developed with discussions ongoing with the British Dental Association to help inform investment decisions that are patient centred and offer value for money.

Under any new investment arrangements, support will be provided on the basis of current activity, resulting in GPs and practices undertaking the most Health Service activity receiving the most additional support. Full details of the new arrangements will be communicated at the earliest opportunity.

The primary objectives of the new scheme will be to:

- Incentivise activity to make full use of available capacity within General Dental Services (GDS) and support practices in doing so;
- Support the sustainability of the service whilst allowing for a transition away from additional pandemic specific support; and
- Ease entry for dentists into the GDS, changes to working patterns and movement within the profession, that has been stymied over the last 20 months.

PPE Costs

As we enter 2022/23, reimbursement for the additional cost of PPE will continue to be available via the 3001 item code in the Statement of Dental Remuneration. As outlined in my letter of 6 August 2021, value of PPE has been monitored on a monthly basis. Since September there has been a gradual reduction in the cost of PPE and we are now at a point where it is appropriate to revise the value of a 3001 claim from £12 to £11 to reflect the current market price of 2 sets of Level 2 PPE required to perform AGPs, as outlined in the GDS Operational Guidance. This change will be made as soon as possible.

As community transmission of COVID-19 falls, it is anticipated that practitioners will be in a position to provide AGPs to non-respiratory pathway patients with Level 1 PPE, along with the other mitigations laid out in the Hierarchy of Controls in the current Operational Guidance. The payment for claims under item 30 will be reviewed in line with Departmental Policy towards the end of March 2022. Any policy changes will be informed by the latest clinical and scientific advice and consideration of the COVID situation in Northern Ireland.

Living With COVID Plan for England

The Department of Health is carefully considering the UK Government's Living With COVID Plan for England and its implications for Northern Ireland. No decisions have been taken on any changes to Test and Trace in Northern Ireland. All aspects of the COVID-19 test and trace programme in Northern Ireland will be kept under review to ensure it remains proportionate and effective.

Yours sincerely



Michael O'Neill
Head of General Dental & Ophthalmic Services

Cc: Caroline Lappin, Chief Dental Officer
Michael Donaldson, Head of Dental Services HSCB