

## GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY DIRECTORATE



To: All NI General Dental Practitioners  
BY EMAIL

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### GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES UPDATE

I am writing to provide you with an update on a number of developments that the Department has been progressing in recent months to support the provision of General Dental Services (GDS) to patients.

#### 2022/23 Pay remit

In relation to the 2022/23 pay uplift, Minister had already announced in July 2022 his intention to accept the recommendations made in the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Doctor and Dentists' Review Body for 4.5% net increase to fees and allowances. This payment also includes a 4.5% increase in dental expenses, with an overall recurring increased investment in GDS of approximately £4.84m per annum.

As you will be aware, before leaving his post, Minister was unable to announce the immediate implementation of these pay awards locally, as Northern Ireland still does not have an agreed Executive Budget for 2022/23. Whilst elements of the pay uplift are outwith the control of the Department of Health, particularly this year, we will do everything possible to implement as soon as possible.

Further communication will follow when additional information is known.

#### Prior Approval Limit

The Department has also recognised the necessity to review and adjust the current Prior Approval Limits (PAL) contained within the dental regulations. I am pleased to

advise that, following consultation with the British Dental Association (BDA), the Department has now amended the General Dental Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 (S.R. 1993 No. 326) to move the PAL into the Statement of Dental Remuneration (SDR). This means that amendments to the PAL are now solely within the gift of the Department of Health, without requiring a change in regulations. This amendment will facilitate a proactive ability to adjust the PAL in line with the SDR that provides payment for dental services, facilitate timeous treatment and improve administrative efficiency.

Further to that development, I can also advise that, noting the last change to the PAL was in 2003, Minister has approved an increase of the PAL to £380. It is intended that the increased PAL of £380 will be implemented in February 2023 to allow appropriate system changes to accommodate adjustments.

Further communication will follow with more detail on the specific timings of the change in due course.

### Patient Registrations

As you will be aware, since March 2020, due to the acute challenges of the pandemic, the duration of the capitation and continuing care (CCC) arrangements for patients (patient registrations) have been extended in return for the continuation of CCC payments to GPs.

This was done to prevent large numbers of patient registrations lapsing as a result of individuals being unable to obtain a dental appointment due to the reduced capacity within General Dental Services (GDS) caused by the pandemic and to maintain the important capitation and continuing care payments to General Dental Practitioners (GPs).

As restrictions have reduced we are now in a position where a return to the normal schedule of 25 month registration periods is appropriate. However, to avoid the scenario where a large number of patient registrations lapse in one go, following consultation with the BDA, the GDS regulations have been amended to add a specific number of months on to three patient registration cohorts, so that registrations are scheduled to lapse at the same rate as they would normally.

To allow practices time to manage this, the intention is that the first patients will be due to lapse at the end of March 2023. This will result in those patients whose registrations were due to lapse in March 2020 now lapsing in March 2023, those due to lapse in April 2020 will now lapse in April 2023 and so on.

However, it is not appropriate to add the same number of months to every single patient's registration. Doing so would result in someone registered today remaining on the register until September 2027. Therefore patients are being split into three cohorts based on registration date and managed as follows.

1. Any patient whose registration commenced or was last extended between 1 March 2018 and 29 February 2020 shall have **36 months** added to the 25 month registration period.
2. Any patient whose registration commenced or was last extended between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 shall have **24 months** added to the 25 month registration period.
3. Any patient whose registration commenced or was last extended between 01 March 2021 and 28 February 2022 shall have **12 months** added to the 25 month registration period.

The Business Service Organisation (BSO) have advised that the 'about to lapse' warnings will continue as normal and practitioners can currently view patients due to lapse 4 months in advance via Dental Portal. Select - Payment Summary and they are listed in Capitation overview/ Patients Due to Lapse in 4 Months.

For any further clarification on the implementation of this process, please contact [GDS.Correspondence@hscni.net](mailto:GDS.Correspondence@hscni.net)

#### Provision of Dentures

Since the start of 2022/23 the Department have received reports that the cost associated with the provision of the dentures has been steadily increasing.

As you will know, tooth loss due to dental decay and gum disease is common among the most vulnerable groups in our society, so ensuring access to dentures, which help with eating, talking and quality of life is an important oral health intervention.

I am pleased, therefore, to advise that the Minister has announced a 25% enhancement to the fees for dentures from Q4 2022/23 for the provision of this important service. This follows the Ministers commitment to support dentistry where possible and represents a further £1.2m recurring investment in General Dental Services.

Subject to the approval of the relevant business case, the 25% enhancement will be applied automatically to all claims for the items listed in **Annex A** from the start of Q4 2022/23, irrespective of whether the claiming GDP applies for the GDS Rebuilding Support Scheme (RSS). For those in receipt of RSS payments, please note that these codes will be excluded from any RSS calculation, to avoid a double enhancement.

In due course the intention is to reflect these increases in the SDR.

#### Dental Contract / Payment Reform

In the last number of months, with the anticipated absence of Minister's looming and the impact that may have for decision making in the short term, officials' focus has primarily been on delivering the developments outlined in this letter. As a result, a meeting due to take place with BDA representatives at the end of September 2022

was postponed at the request of the Department. However Minister Swann was also very clear in his commitment to reform and we intend to revive that important workstream in the coming weeks and months focusing both on short term and longer term reform actions and deliverables, with a focus on engagement in the first instance.

Finally, it would remiss of me not to acknowledge the uncertain political and financial climate that we know that practices are working in at present. These challenges can also affect how the Department can respond, but we are committed to continuing to work with the sector in making changes that improve services for patients in a way that is sustainable for practices.

Thank you again for your commitment and continued support.

Yours sincerely



**Michael O'Neill**  
**Head of General Dental & Ophthalmic Services**

**Cc: Ciara Gallagher, Chair of the Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee**  
**Tristen Kelso, Northern Ireland Director of the British Dental Association**  
**Caroline Lappin, Chief Dental Officer**  
**Robbie Davis, Director of General Healthcare Policy Directorate**  
**Michael Donaldson, Head of Dental Services SPPG**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Codes included</b>		
PROVISION OF DENTURES	27(a)	2701	2712	
		2711	2721	
	27(b)	2731	2733	
		2732	2734	
	27(c)	2741	2745	
		2742	2746	
		2743	2751	
		2744		
	27(d)	2761	2762	
		2762		
	27(e)	2771	2781	
		2772	2782	
	REPAIRS AND ALTERATIONS TO DENTURES	28(a)	2801	2804
			2802	2811
2803			2812	
28(b)		2821	2841	
		2831	2842	
		2832		
28(c)		2851	2854	
		2852	2855	
		2853	2856	
28(d)		2861	2866	
		2862	2871	
		2863	2872	
		2865		
OBTURATORS, SPLINTS AND SIMILAR APPLIANCES OTHER THAN ORTHODONTIC APPLIANCES		29(a)	2901	
	29(b)	2911		
	29(c)	2921	2924	
		2922	2926	
		2923		
REPAIRS AND ALTERATIONS TO DENTURES AND OTHER APPLIANCES	55(a)	5501	5511	
		5502	5512	
		5503	5521	
		5504		
	55(c)	5551	5554	
		5552	5555	
		5553	5556	
	55(d)	5561	5566	
		5562	5571	
		5563	5572	
		5565		