

08 March 2021

Denplan chairs policy roundtable on the future of dentistry

Denplan, part of Simplyhealth, held an inaugural virtual dental policy roundtable on the 23rd February to discuss the future of dentistry and the issues impacting the dental profession. The event was attended by a group of clinicians, academics and policymakers from different areas of the profession to share their knowledge and experience of dentistry in the current climate.

Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director at Simplyhealth, chaired the event and was joined by Professor Avijit Banerjee of Kings College London, Sir Paul Beresford, Conservative MP for Mole Valley, Dr John Makin of the Dental Defence Union, Dr John Milne of the CQC, Dr Hannah Woolnough of Parkview Dental Centre, Dr Lauren Harray of Sparkle Dental Centre, Dr Ian Mills of General Dental Practitioners, and Dr Raj Rattan MBE, Dental Director at Dental Protection, Medical Protection Society.

With over 19 million dental appointments lost over the course of 2020¹, and Denplan's dentist member survey revealing that nearly 70%² said that they felt politicians and decision makers in government didn't sufficiently understand the dentistry sector, Denplan's roundtable comes at an opportune moment.

Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director at Simplyhealth, said: "The coronavirus pandemic has exposed – and in many cases exacerbated – the issues facing mixed and private dental practices across the UK. We all know from first-hand experience, that over the last 12 months practice teams have done tremendous work in meeting patient care needs and carrying out treatments under challenging circumstances.

"However, given the large patient backlogs and the spotlight currently on dentistry, combined with the recent publication of the Department of Health and Social Care's White paper on the future of healthcare, now is the window of opportunity for members

¹ British Dental Association <https://www.bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/dentists-government-holds-the-key-to-restore-services-to-millions>

² Denplan member dentist survey, fieldwork carried out 1st-20th October 2020, 384 members surveyed.

of the dental profession, to make their voices heard and influence the policy agenda for the dental sector.”

The roundtable addressed a range of issues including the mental health and the wellbeing of dental teams as well as training the next generation of dentists and dental nurses. Also discussed were innovations such as how digital technology is shaping the delivery of dental care, and how oral health needs to find its rightful place in the sphere of general healthcare. Thoughts were also given as to how the dental profession will transition to a post-Covid world.

Spotlight on mental health for dental teams

The difficult pandemic working conditions over the past year, combined with fast paced changes in regulations for practices, have resulted in mental health strains and deteriorating morale across dental teams. Dental teams have also had to contend with taking on a certain level of risk of contracting the virus in their frontline roles.

While many practices have provided good support and mentoring throughout the pandemic, in the cases of associates and dental nurses, there are indications they are feeling the pressures of the pandemic environment acutely. This has been compounded by the fact that some dentists have suffered from a lack of support network in certain aspects.

Recruitment and retention of dental staff

Although the backlog in dental procedures has placed practices and dental teams under immense strain, it was stated that there is also an opportunity to reshape the way we deliver dentistry to meet this challenge and allow wider practice teams the opportunity to step up as they have done throughout the pandemic. Dental nurses, hygienists, and therapists perhaps have a larger role to play in the delivery of dental care as work to clear procedure backlogs, patient demand for cosmetic treatments increase and the focus of public health policy shifts towards a more preventative approach to oral health.

The Roundtable also highlighted the pandemic has led to a large spike in interest as nursing as a profession and it was suggested the dental sector should be taking advantage of this opportunity to recruit young people.

Technology in clinical dentistry

The increasing usage of digital technology within dentistry formed a key part of the roundtable discussion. With Denplan's member research showing that 1 in 4 practices are providing virtual consultations and 1 in 5 using digital impressions, and 1 in 7 employing computer aided design and milling for indirect replacements³, digital tech in dentistry is following the same path as the wider healthcare sector with telemedicine, monitoring and diagnostics increasingly becoming the norm.

Members of the roundtable echoed the view of many in the profession that there is great potential in digital technology to help facilitate a more person-centred approach to dentistry that moves beyond the physical confines of the dental chair to enable better dispensation of oral health advice, monitoring of chronic conditions and post-surgery check-ups.

One note of caution was that technology should be viewed as an enabler, not a solution.

Lobbying for the future of the profession

As the difficulties and challenges continue for the dental sector, Denplan is optimistic about the power of the collective voice of the dental profession in raising these common themes and bringing them to the immediate attention of MP's and policymakers. Denplan is set to play an integral part to lobby for the future of the profession and Denplan will be publishing its own white paper on the future of dentistry.

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Notes to Editors:

About Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth:

Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth, is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist with more than 6,600 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.6 million patients registered to Denplan products.

Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth, also provides a wide range of professional services for its member dentists and their practice teams, including the Denplan Quality Programme and

³ Denplan member dentist survey, fieldwork carried out 1st-20th October 2020, 384 members surveyed.

Denplan Excel Certification Programme. Plus regulatory advice, business and marketing consultancy services and networking opportunities.

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About Simplyhealth

Since 1872 we've been helping people get healthcare through our health plans, charity partnerships and by being a voice in healthcare. Today we're delighted to be the UK's leading provider of health and dental plans, which help individuals, families, and employees to get support with their health when they need it.

We don't have shareholders which means we are totally focused on making sure no one goes without the healthcare support they need, and why we are passionate about being a voice in healthcare and partnering with charities to reduce health inequality. We have a commitment to donate part of our pre-tax profits to charities or community projects each year and spread our donations across a wide range of healthcare-related charities.

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