

## Summary Report of the Dental Workforce Planning Review March 2006

### Introduction

This document is a summary the second comprehensive review of the dental professional workforce published in March 2006. The first review was completed in 2002. The reviews form part of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's (Department's) regional workforce planning initiative.

The purpose of the review is to provide the Department with comprehensive current information on the Dental workforce across Northern Ireland. This will inform the Department's planning in the provision of training for this profession to facilitate service provision over the next 10 years.

The Dental workforce comprises three main areas: -

- **General Dental Service (GDS);**
- **Community Dental Service (CDS); *and***
- **Hospital Dental Service.**

The majority of the dental workforce is employed in the General Dental Service either as practice owners or associate dentists.

The Community Dental Service makes up approximately 10% of the overall dentist compliment in Northern Ireland and provides care for individuals who would not otherwise seek treatment under the GDS; are unable to seek treatment under the GDS; or require treatment not generally available in the GDS.

The Hospital Dental Service in Northern Ireland encompasses a group of specialists working in oral and maxillofacial surgery, oral medicine, orthodontics, restorative and paediatric dentistry.

The review takes into account the dental workforce in the Hospital, Community and Independent Practitioner contexts, and addresses issues for the overall dental care team.

The likely workforce implication of recent contractual changes including the New Consultants Contract and the European Working Time Directive, are also considered.

### Methodology

The Department has developed a collaborative methodology, applied in all uni-professional reviews, which relies on the co-operation of an Advisory Group comprising HPSS representatives and other key stakeholders. The workforce planning process involved five phases. These included: -

- (1) Project Initiation
- (2) Research and Literature Review

- (3) Key Informant Interviews
- (4) Focus Groups
- (5) Analysis and reporting

### **Key Workforce Statistics**

The review notes a total of 896 Dental professionals are employed in Northern Ireland, comprising the following: -

- 726 in General Dental Service (42% female and 58% are male);
- 94 in the Community Dental Service (74% female and 26% male);
- 58 in the Hospital Dental Service (36% female and 64% are male); and
- 18 Others. The “Others” include a small group of dental professionals employed by Boards and the Department and are not included in the workforce planning given their small number and very specific role.

### **Leavers and Joiners**

On average 10 people leave and 10 join the Hospital Dental Service each year and other staff groupings show between one and two leavers and joiners annually.

### **Gender**

The General Dental Service and Hospital Dental Service are currently predominately male, at 58% and 64% respectively. Current statistics show, however, a higher proportion of males in the higher age band and indicate that these services will exhibit a higher proportion of female staff in the future.

The Community Dental Service is predominantly female at 74%. This pattern is likely to continue, as there are no male staff in the lower age bands.

Workforce research indicates that this gender distribution is likely to bring an increase in part-time working in the future.

### **Supply vs Demand**

Whereas the 2002 review indicated an under-provision of dentists by 2012, the findings of this review in respect of the CDS, GDS and HDS indicate progression towards a relative balance in supply and demand over the next 10 years. Variation in any of the supply and demand factors will alter this situation. This will be kept under review annually and corrective action taken as necessary.

### **Recommendations**

To achieve this, it is recommended that:

- Undergraduate places available in QUB School of Dentistry are increased by five places;
- Vocational training places are increased from the current 24 places, ideally to 40;

- A more creative approach is developed to recruit dentists to hard to fill posts;
- Reward and terms and conditions of employment for salaried dentists are reviewed to address recruitment and retention difficulties;
- Further work should be taken forward to develop career pathways in the HDS;
- Work is taken forward to address securing an adequate supply of consultants to cover the needs of the dental specialisms;
- Further work should be carried out on the development of the Dental Care Professionals groups to support provision of the full range of dental services;
- Given the high proportion of private practitioners in this field, it is recognised that gaps exist in the current sources of information available for workforce planning. It is proposed that a regular workforce census should be conducted to ensure accuracy of information for all staff in the profession.

## **Conclusions**

The Dental Workforce Planning report indicates a largely positive picture of the Dental Workforce over the next 10 years. If investment is made in the additional training places identified above and in addressing meaningful career pathways for all members of the dental team, a state of balance should be achieved over the next 10 years.

The workforce composition is changing from a traditionally male dominated profession, as increasing numbers of females are entering the dental workforce. Any impact on working patterns and workforce supply resulting from the increased proportion of females entering the workforce should be assessed and managed as necessary.

With the increasing focus on oral health, more emphasis on preventative and cosmetic dentistry, and the uncertainty regarding potential movement to private practice, it will be important to monitor these trends and developments over the next few years.

**Dental Workforce Planning Review  
Advisory Group Membership**

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Doreen Wilson	Chief Dental Officer, DHSSPS
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