



HELPING YOU PUT THINGS RIGHT...

.....
ANNUAL REVIEW
2011-12



2 MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This is the sixth year of the Dental Complaints Service: six highly-successful years that we can be justifiably proud of. Today the Dental Complaints Service stands amongst the best – if not the best – of an outstanding example of what a complaints service can be: effective, efficient and quick in resolving the issues it is asked to deal with.

The Dental Complaints Service deals with complaints about private dental care and can point you in the right direction for help if you are an NHS patient. We run a free service and are funded by the General Dental Council. (The GDC still deals with issues of patient safety through its “fitness to practise” procedures that are managed separately from us.)

Delivering a world-class service is never easy and is only ever achieved with the commitment and help of many people. In our case I want to pay tribute to the staff and our volunteers who do so much to make the service a success. But I want to highlight early in this message one group whose support has been fundamental to the achievements of the Dental Complaints Service, and I refer to the dentists and other members of the dental profession who have and continue to work and engage with us and their patients to resolve the complaints referred to us.

I cannot stress enough the contribution that the dental profession has made to our continued success. Without their support our work would have been much harder, patients may well have had to wait much longer for their complaints to be resolved and, of course, there would almost certainly been a lot more dissatisfied patients. For this support and engagement I thank them.

There are as many reasons for complaining as there are people who want to complain. However, above all a complaint is clearly an indication that something has gone wrong and to the extent where the patient feels the need to do something about it. I hope that the days when complaints were seen only in a negative way are gone, complaints can – as our experience has shown – be a real opportunity to improve communication or some aspect of service, or indeed to be able to offer an explanation of why the treatment had been provided in a particular way.



Nine out of ten of patients and dental professionals thought the standards of our service were 'excellent' or 'good'.

I am particularly proud of one result of our service and our approach to resolving complaints is that the overwhelming majority of complainants stay with the dental practice they complained about. Good, customer-focused businesses and organisations welcome complaints. Our experience shows that such an approach brings real benefits to the patients and the dental practice. Research has shown that when a complaint is handled well people tell their friends, not about the original issue, but rather about how well the complaint was dealt with – something well worth remembering.

What has made our service the success that it is? Well, we have worked hard to make our complaints service easy to use – for both the patient and the dental professional – and we know from feedback that our users find our staff friendly and keen to listen. Our approach is open and transparent and aims to deal with a complaint as quickly as possible. This year the majority of complaints were resolved in an average of 7.5 days, a timescale we are committed to reducing further. We will check if you have raised your complaint with the dental practice; they should be given the chance to resolve it. But if you are still dissatisfied we will work impartially with you and the dental professional to resolve the complaint as quickly and effectively as possible, to 'put things right' in the words of our slogan.

So how has our sixth year been? Well, we have:

- Dealt with 1,887 complaints – 17 per cent more than in the previous year.
- Resolved two thirds of those complaints in less than a week.
- Achieved an average resolution time of 7.5 days.
- Taken 9,565 calls to our local-rate complaints hotline.
- And recovered since the start of the service in excess of £1 million pounds for patients.

Nine out of ten of patients and dental professionals thought the standards of service provided by our staff were 'excellent' or 'good'. We always strive to improve but, as is clear from the feedback from patients and professionals alike, our service is highly valued. We deliver a world-class service and continue to show others, not least in healthcare, how to handle complaints quickly and effectively.

Earlier I paid tribute to the contribution that dental professionals have played in our success. There are, of course, others whose commitment and support play a vital role and to whom much thanks is due. Our staff, under the direction of Hazel Adams, their hard work and enthusiasm underpins all that we do. Evlynn Gilvarry the Chief Executive and Registrar of the General Dental Council – her support is much appreciated. As is that of my colleague Council members at the GDC and of course my fellow members of the service's advisory board.

Our sixth year has been one of continued development of our service; we look forward with confidence to our seventh.

Derek Prentice

WHO WE ARE

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Our service is free thanks to funding from the General Dental Council
- We are independent of the Council, the NHS and the Government
- We will treat you fairly, whatever your background or circumstances
- We do not take sides

DCS Advisory Board members

- Derek Prentice**, Chair and lay member of the General Dental Council
- Tony Kilcoyne**, Dentist member of the General Dental Council
- Mabel Slater**, Dental Care Professional member of the General Dental Council
- Anne Marie Telford**, Lay member of the General Dental Council
- Grahame Owen**, Lay member of the General Dental Council
- Shelagh Farrell**, Dentist from the Faculty of General Dental Practitioners
- John Mooney**, Dentist from the British Dental Association
- Mike Drewry**, Lay member from the Trading Standards Institute
- Gary Waller**, Lay member and consumer representative from Which?

Members of the Advisory Board meet four times a year to review our operational progress, customer service and how the service is performing to business and financial plans.



The DCS team

- Head of Service – Hazel Adams
- Operations Manager – Lana Koubat
- Panel Secretary – Sally Reid

Complaints Officers:

- Emran Miah
- Gulshan Khurana
- Jane Kavanagh
- Lillian Fox
- Martin Lovejoy
- Michelle Williams
- Rihanne Stephen



We are able to give confidence and support patients in approaching dental professionals themselves to find a local resolution.”

DCS TEAM

HOW WE WORK

We know that the longer a complaint goes on, the more difficult it becomes and less likely to be resolved.

Our trained advisors help private dental patients and dental professionals settle complaints about private dental care.

We work to reach a solution that both sides are happy with, whether that's remedial treatment (treatment to put previous dental work right), a refund, an apology or an explanation.

We may be able to solve the problem by offering support and advice to the patient to achieve a local resolution, assist in a facilitated resolution by working with both parties or we could hold a panel meeting which may result in our panel making a recommendation.

We are also able to point patients in the right direction if we are not able to help ourselves, highlighting other routes they can explore.



OUR EASY-TO-USE, THREE-STEP SERVICE ASSISTS IN RESOLVING MATTERS

STEP ONE

Patients can call our local rate hotline: **08456 120540**, visit our website: **www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk** or write to us:

Dental Complaints Service
Stephenson House
2 Cherry Orchard Road
Croydon
CR0 6BA

We will always suggest that you contact your dental professional and give them the opportunity to resolve matters first. They are keen to help and deal with any concerns that you may have.

STEP TWO

If you are not satisfied with the response from the dental professional and are unable to resolve the matter, our complaints officers will work with you and the dental professional to try and reach a resolution. Our service is impartial therefore we do not take sides.



STEP THREE

If a resolution can't be reached and both patient and dental professional are in agreement, we would arrange a panel meeting; this is the final stage of our complaints process. The panel consists of two lay members and a dental professional. They will hear both sides of the complaint and work towards facilitating an amicable resolution between the patient and dental professional. If an agreement can't be reached, the panel will make a recommendation in order to resolve the complaint.

We will work with the patient and dental professional to try and reach a resolution. Our service is impartial therefore we do not take sides.

There are several ways in which a complaint may be resolved. The panel may suggest:

- An explanation is given for what has happened
- That there is no case to answer based on the information provided
- A full or partial refund of fees
- A contribution towards remedial treatment, so that the work can be completed by another dental professional at the same practice or at an alternative practice

Often complaints come to us at the suggestion of a dental professional, and practices can and do contact us for advice about a complaint. We are of course always happy to assist.

In order to prevent a complaint from escalating we would suggest the following:

- Acknowledge that a complaint has been raised
- Provide a written reply within 10 working days. If it is not possible to do so, send a holding letter advising the patient of a date that they can anticipate a full reply
- Follow through on any arrangements made
- Consult with your defence organisation/indemnifiers for advice

You can't always prevent a complaint from being raised, however, following the above steps can help to prevent it from escalating.



8 STATISTICS

We received 14,145 calls between May 2011 and April 2012 compared with 13,522 for the same period in 2010-11, an increase of 4.5%. Of these 9,565 were received through the 08456 120540 local rate telephone number.

17
% Increase in complaints from the previous year

The top five treatment types for complaints

- Crown **16%**
- Denture (full and partial) **15%**
- Filling (tooth coloured and amalgam) **14%**
- Root canal treatment **9%**
- Implant **9%**





1,887 COMPLAINTS

Logged between May 2011 and April 2012 compared to 1,559 in the same period in 2010-11. This represents an increase of 17%. Based on previous year's results this trend is almost certain to continue.

THIS IS THE FIRST YEAR THAT THE DCS WEBSITE HAS BECOME THE MAIN SOURCE OF CONTACT.



Where did people hear of DCS

- DCS Website – 47%
- Telephone Directories – 12%
- Dental Practices – 5%
- GDC – 5%
- Word of Mouth – 4%
- Primary Care Trusts – 3%
- Other – 24% (includes other consumer organisations such as Which? Local Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureaux. This will be broken down into separate categories for future reporting).

RESOLVED
TWO THIRDS
OF COMPLAINTS IN
LESS THAN A WEEK



10

The low number of panel meetings is one indication that dental professionals engage positively with complaints and the service.

The most frequent concerns raised by patients are:

– Being uninformed

Not being made aware of the prognosis of treatment or alternative treatment options were not given to them

– Unclear information provided

Either not explained fully or clinical terminology used

– Ignored when concerns were raised

Refusal to continue care or ignoring attempts to resolve the matter

Between May 2011 and April 2012 there were 11 panel meetings held. We currently have 89 volunteer panel members across the UK, one third of these are dental professionals and two thirds lay members.

In two cases a refund was recommended and on another occasion a contribution towards remedial treatment. In the remaining eight cases it was found that there was no case to answer in relation to the actual complaint, however, on occasions recommendations were made for the dental professionals' future practice, for example, improvements to record keeping and providing a treatment plan.

Panel meetings were held in the following regions: seven in the South East and also one each in London, the West Midlands, the North West and also Yorkshire and Humberside.

11 **ADVICE AND LOCAL RESOLUTION**

The expertise and wide-ranging knowledge of our advisors can make all the difference to patients. We are able to give them confidence and support in approaching their dental professionals themselves to find a local resolution.

CASE STUDY: FINDING A COMPROMISE

What happened:

The patient required a bridge and was given a verbal quote of £250. After the bridge was fitted, the patient was asked to pay £850, which he did. The patient was unhappy with the misquote and expressed his concerns to the practice manager. She apologised for the mistake and told the patient that she would look into the matter and provide him with an explanation and apology. The patient did not receive further contact from the practice manager and contacted the DCS for advice. He explained that he was seeking a refund of £300 to resolve the matter (half the amount of the difference between the two quotes).

Our advice:

We advised the patient to contact his dental professional (dentist) directly, explain his concerns and give him the opportunity to resolve the matter.

What happened next:

The patient followed the guidance provided by us and met with his dental professional to discuss the complaint. They agreed a refund of £200 which resolved the matter without the need for us to contact the dental professional.

CASE STUDY: OFFERING SUPPORT

What happened:

The patient attended the practice for a tooth whitening procedure for which he paid £500. He felt that the benefits of the treatment were short-lived, for example, his teeth were white for a certain period then reverted back to their original colour. The patient visited the dental professional (dentist) several times and further attempts were made at improving the whitening. This, however, did not resolve the matter. The patient attempted to call the dental professional on several occasions in order to request a refund and was not able to get through to him. As the dental professional did not return the patient's calls, he contacted the DCS for advice.

Our advice:

The DCS advised the patient to put his concerns in writing to the dental professional, clarify the outcome he was seeking and allow 10 working days for a response.

What happened next:

The patient wrote to the dental professional who offered him a partial refund of £250 which was accepted. The matter was therefore resolved without the need for the DCS to contact the dental professional.

CASE STUDY: CLARIFYING OUTCOMES

What happened:

The patient received a root canal treatment and filling on a molar, for which he paid £350. Following the treatment, he felt discomfort when biting on the filled tooth. Due to his personal circumstances, he could not attend to the matter immediately; he contacted the practice for an appointment five months following the initial treatment as he started to experience pain. He was given an appointment with a different dental professional at the same practice. The dental professional informed him that there was a crack in the filling and also an infection which had to be treated with antibiotics. She advised him that the remedial work would cost £115. The patient felt that this treatment should be carried out by his original dental professional and contacted the DCS for advice.

Our advice:

The DCS informed the patient that he needed to make his original dental professional aware of his concerns. He was advised to write to the dental professional detailing his complaint, clarifying the outcome that he was seeking and allow 10 working days for a response.

What happened next:

The patient wrote to the dental professional who agreed to carry out the required work at no additional cost which resolved the matter without the need for the DCS to contact the dental professional.

13 FACILITATED RESOLUTION

There are times when the DCS needs to step in and help broker a resolution. The advisors will work to understand the position of both the patient and the dental professional, acting as a point of contact to keep things moving.

CASE STUDY: SECOND OPINION

What happened:

The patient received treatment involving seven implants and an implant-retained denture for which she paid £14,000. Following the treatment, the patient experienced pain. She found the denture uncomfortable and difficult to remove/re-place for hygiene purposes. The patient contacted the DCS and explained that she was seeking a full refund in order to get remedial treatment completed elsewhere.

Our advice:

The DCS advised the patient to put her concerns in writing to the dental professional (dentist), clarify the outcome she was seeking and allow 10 working days for a response. The patient followed the DCS's advice, however, did not receive a reply back from the dental professional within the stated time.

What happened next:

The DCS contacted the dental professional who explained that he was seeking advice from his defence organisation in order to resolve the complaint. The dental professional confirmed that he required a second opinion to consider the patient's request for a full refund and offered to cover the cost of the consultation. The DCS discussed the matter with the patient who agreed to attend a consultation with a different dental professional chosen from a list supplied by the defence organisation. Following receipt of the second opinion report, the dental professional offered a refund of £7,000 as a gesture of goodwill. The patient declined the offer and confirmed that she would accept a refund of £8,445. This was agreed to by the dental professional.

14

CASE STUDY: **SPEEDY RESOLUTION**

What happened:

The patient received full upper and lower dentures for which she paid £695. She felt the dentures were uncomfortable and made her mouth feel sore. When she informed the dental professional (Clinical Dental Technician) of the matter, he suggested that her dentures were relined. This, however, did not resolve the discomfort experienced by the patient.

As a result, the patient wrote to the dental professional requesting a refund. The dental professional offered her a partial refund of £395 which she declined before contacting the DCS for assistance.

What happened next:

When the DCS contacted the dental professional to discuss the complaint, they were informed by the practice manager that he was on sickness leave and was recovering from a serious health condition. The practice manager explained that she was aware of the patient's complaint and would discuss the matter further with the dental professional as she was in regular contact with him. The DCS suggested that the practice manager seeks authorisation to liaise directly with the dental professional's defence organisation, this was in order to assist him in resolving the complaint during his recovery. The dental professional was happy for this to take place. Upon review of the complaint, the defence organisation recommended a full refund of £695 which the dental professional agreed to. This resulted in a speedy resolution being reached.

15 **PANEL MEETINGS**

Panels take place when all other efforts have failed to find a solution.

Panel members are carefully selected and trained to work with patients and dental professionals face to face at specially-held meetings.

CASE STUDY: **RECORD KEEPING**

What happened:

The patient wanted upper and lower dentures and so attended a dental professional (Clinical Dental Technician). Once the dentures had been made, the patient complained that they were loose and caused pain.

The patient contacted the dental professional shortly after the dentures were fitted and the dentures were adjusted. When this failed to resolve the problem the dental professional offered to reline the dentures. The patient refused this offer and subsequently wrote to the dental professional requesting a full refund of £795.

The dental professional refused to offer a refund and advised the patient to contact the DCS.

What happened next:

The DCS then attempted to facilitate a resolution between both parties. A partial refund of £379.50 was offered by the dental professional, however, was declined by the patient. No further offer was made until the panel meeting was arranged.

When the panel met, they endorsed an agreement between the dental professional and patient for a partial refund of £695 as well as the return of the dentures. The panel also recommended that the dental professional reviews his record keeping and ensures that patient records are both accurate and comprehensive.

16

CASE STUDY: PANEL RECOMMENDATION

What happened:

The patient attended a dental professional (dentist) for three crowns. This related to her Upper left 5 (UL5), Upper left 6 (UL6) and Upper right 1 (UR1) teeth. A total of £1,275 was paid for this treatment. A year later, the patient experienced toothache and attended a new dental professional at a different practice.

Following an examination by the new dental professional, the patient wrote to the original dental professional. She advised that she felt the UL5 should have been extracted and UL6 should not have been crowned. She also advised that she was dissatisfied with the crown on the UR1. As a result, she requested a full refund of £1,275.

The dental professional responded to the patient declining her request for a refund. The patient therefore contacted the DCS for assistance.



What happened next:

The DCS contacted the dental professional and discussed the complaint. He explained that he would reconsider the patient's request for a refund upon receipt of a second opinion report. The patient provided the report and the information was reviewed by the dental professional. Following this the dental professional advised that he felt a refund was not appropriate as the treatment he had provided was of an acceptable level.

In the absence of an agreement between both parties, the DCS organised a panel meeting. The complaint was discussed in detail, however, the patient and dental professional could not come to an agreement. Based on the clinical records and information provided by both the patient and dental professional at the meeting, the panel found that there was no complaint to answer in relation to the case.

OUR PLANS FOR 2012-13

- Make sure patients and dental professionals can find us when they need us
 - Ensure that we have a robust complaints management system
 - Continue to reduce our average resolution time
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