

THE NHS CONFIDENCE MONITOR SURVEY

RESULTS

SUMMER 2018



EDITION 6

Practiceplan
The business of dentistry

Part of the **WESLEYAN** Group

WELCOME TO THE 6TH NHS CONFIDENCE MONITOR SURVEY



Introduction from **Nigel Jones**

Sales & Marketing Director at Practice Plan

Back in 2014, when Practice Plan first started commissioning surveys asking NHS professionals to rate their confidence levels in the future of NHS dentistry, we envisaged fluctuating levels that reflected the positives and negatives we anticipated emerging from the various NHS initiatives across the UK and, in particular, from the NHS England dental pilots and prototype contracts.

However, the reality has been a story of consistently deteriorating confidence in the future for NHS dentistry which, coupled with growing discomfort with working under current NHS contractual arrangements, suggests NHS dentistry is becoming ever more fragile. Indeed, the BDA has spoken about the need for a crisis to force Government into some sort of action and the 2018 Confidence Monitor Report strongly suggests that such a crisis may not be very far away.

The level of unhappiness felt by NHS dentists in so many aspects of their practising lives is extremely concerning and this culminates in a perception of real tension between

remaining professional and working within an NHS contract. Contrast this with the results showing the happiness of former NHS dentists now working in a predominantly private setting and it is perhaps no surprise that the report reveals 86% of NHS dentists do not see themselves working within the NHS in five years' time.

The tragedy is that almost a quarter of those indicating they will leave the NHS currently intend to leave the profession altogether to explore a change in career. The perceived pressures arising from the fear of the GDC and of litigation were evident in the responses of both NHS and private dentists but were more noticeably more pronounced among those working on the NHS and must be a factor in the apparent disillusionment with dentistry.

While the positivity of those dentists working predominantly with private patients should offer the dental profession some hope, the main thrust of this report suggests NHS dentistry is in a perilous state that can not be ignored by Government.

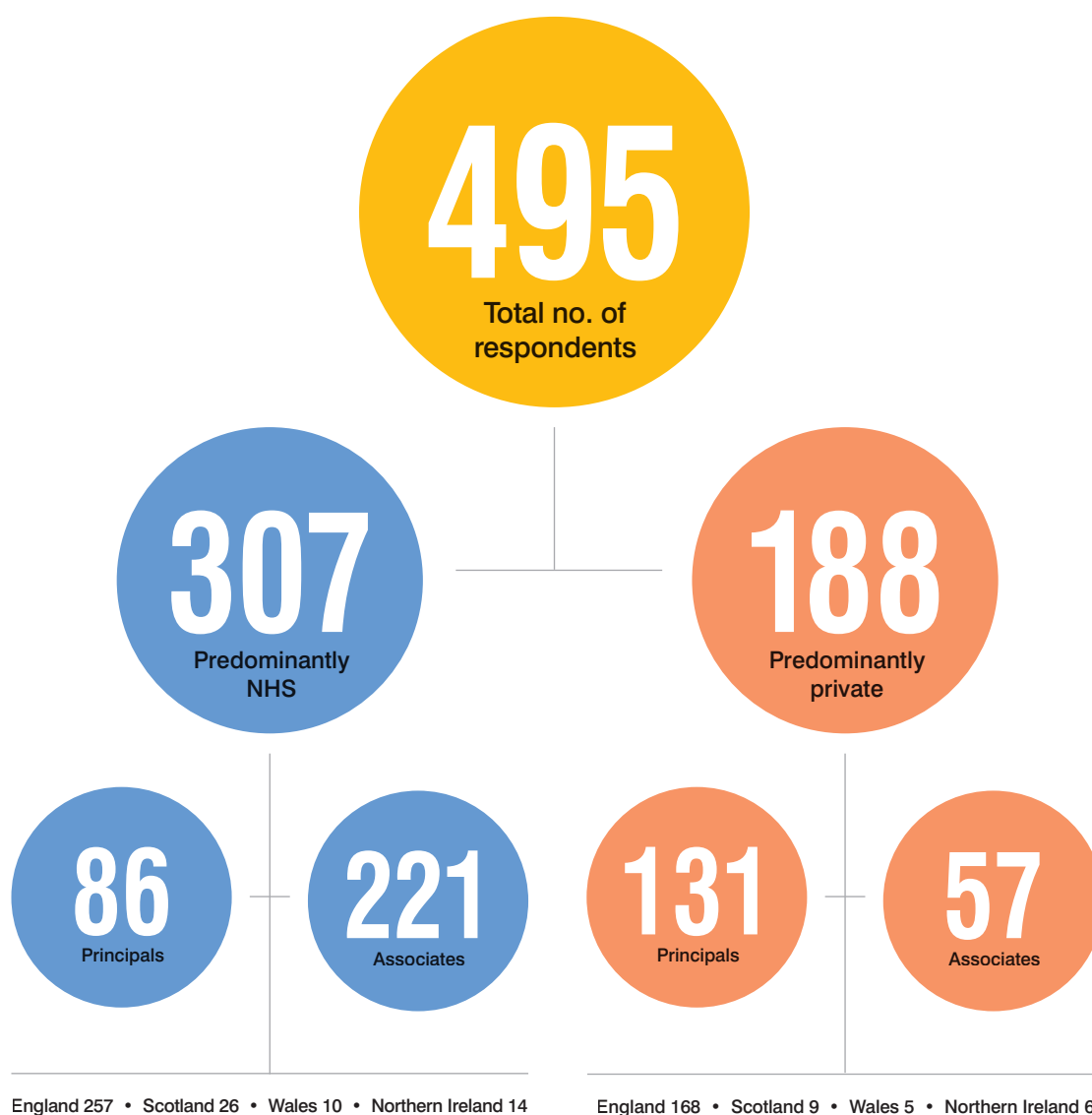
“ The level of unhappiness felt by NHS dentists in so many aspects of their practising lives is extremely concerning and this culminates in a perception of real tension between remaining professional and working within an NHS contract ”

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The NHS Confidence Monitor is an online survey carried out by Practice Plan, promoted in both the dental press and through social media. All respondents opt in to take part and give their answers anonymously.

2018 saw the sixth version of the survey and, for the second time, it was open to both NHS and private dentists. The survey was open for a period of 11 weeks between May and July and almost 500 dental professionals took part. The vast majority of respondents were dentists based in England with a smaller number from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The breakdown of respondents is shown in the graphic below.

The survey included questions about their levels of happiness across seven areas of their working life, anxiety about the risk of complaints and litigation, and their confidence in the future of NHS dentistry.



VIEWS FROM THE PROFESSION

This report contains the full results along with commentary from a number of dental professionals currently working in both NHS and private dentistry. They have shared their thoughts on the results and discuss them in the context of their own experience.



Simon Thackeray

Private dentist and practice owner

Simon has been a GDP since qualifying in 1991, initially he worked in the NHS, and then moved to private practice 2005. Simon sits on the GDPC committee of the BDA and is also a past BDA Branch President for South Yorkshire. He has also gained his Master of Laws Degree.



Stephen Hudson

Private dentist and author of The Dentist's Survival Guide

Stephen qualified at Sheffield Dental School in 1995 and bought his NHS practice in the year 2000. In 2001 he gained MFGDP (not renewed), and in 2010 the Eastman's MSc in Restorative dental practice. He sold his practice in 2017 and has a postgraduate diploma in medical law and in dental law & ethics. Stephen has a keen interest in dental law and ethics and is the author of a number of books on these subjects, including the 'Stressed Dentist's Guide to Dental Law.'



Joe Hendron

NHS dentist & owner of a former prototype practice

Joe was the LDC Conference Chairman in 2018 and practice owner of St Michael's Dental Practice in Wakefield. He became one of the most talked about dentists in the country in February when he withdrew his practice from the prototype programme and wrote an open letter to Jeremy Hunt outlining his reasons why. Joe is passionate about the NHS and about contract reform, having previously been part of the pilot programme.



Dev Patel

Private dentist & dental entrepreneur

Dev is a highly motivated entrepreneur and multi-award winning dentist. He graduated from the University of Manchester in 2012 and completed a diploma course in implantology at the University of Sheffield in 2017. He is currently Principal and Clinical Director of Dental Beauty Swanley. Dev is also the Founder and CEO of Brushlink, an award winning device and app that transforms any toothbrush into a 'smart toothbrush'. He is also co-founder of the UK's largest dental professional network, dentalcircle.com



David Houston

Owner of the Houston Group of dental practices

David is the joint practice principal of the Houston Group of dental practices which provides private dentistry and holds a significant NHS contract. The group also includes the UK's largest single-site practice. He has authored over 50 articles for the dental press, spoken at BACD Annual Scientific meeting and World Aesthetic Congress, and is a former clinical governance lead for North Somerset Primary Care Trust.



Tony Kilcoyne

Private dentist

Tony works mainly in his own specialist referral practice and teaching centre. His vast knowledge and experiences are now utilised by mainstream media with programmes for ITV, C4 and the BBC and he is currently best known as the 'resident dentist' for the popular BBC Radio 2 Jeremy Vine show.



Eddie Crouch

Dentist and deputy chair of the British Dental Association PEC

Eddie works in two practices in Birmingham. He is Vice Chairman of the Birmingham Local Dental Committee, Deputy Chair of the British Dental Association Principal Executive Committee and past Chairman of Central Counties Branch of the British Dental Association.

Any opinions expressed are independent of Tony's other roles, including being a member of the British Dental Association Principal Executive Committee.

NHS DENTISTRY FACES A GROWING THREAT OF MASS EXODUS

Over three-quarters of NHS dentists don't see themselves operating within the NHS in five years' time. With almost one-quarter planning to leave the profession altogether in pursuit of a new career, could this lead to an accessibility crisis of epic proportions for NHS dental patients?

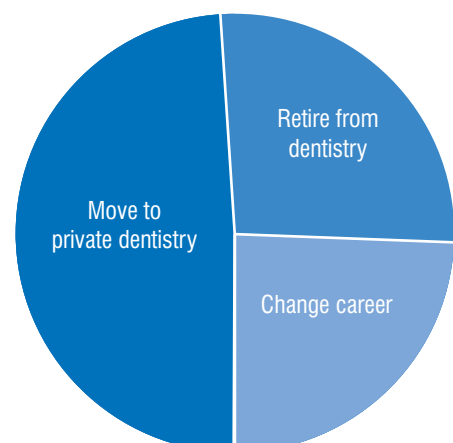
Q Do you see yourself operating within the NHS in five years' time?



Q If you're thinking of leaving the NHS, what are you planning to do?

- Move to private dentistry** 48%
- Retire from dentistry** 28%
- Change career** 24%

264 respondents working predominantly within the NHS



SOME VERY ALARMING TRENDS ARE EMERGING



Comment from
Joe Hendron
Practising dentist

The UDA contract is bad for patients and bad for dentistry. The capped budget for dentistry restricts career progression and makes it more difficult for associates to become practice owners, as does the recent increase in control of practices by corporate businesses. This is challenging the retention of dentists in the profession.

Currently the NHS contract reform project does not provide a sound business model and much more thought needs to be given if it is to be successful. Results of the second year of prototyping need to be much better than those of the first year, but I am hearing that this is not the case.

Although I was alarmed at the numbers who don't see themselves working in the NHS - I was more alarmed to see

the numbers of dentists, of working age, who saw themselves leaving the profession altogether. This is something that needs to be addressed urgently as it is also reflected in similar surveys of the medical profession.

We keep hearing that the Government will not allocate any more money to dentistry, yet more seems to be given to doctors. The question is how would it be spent effectively in dentistry to relieve the pressure that individuals feel day to day?

Micromanagement by NHS England since 2006 is not working and those within the dental profession should be allowed more freedom to decide where and when they want to work.

“ The UDA contract is bad for patients and bad for dentists ”

*If I could afford it, or
find a good opportunity,
I would leave dentistry
tomorrow...today
if possible!*
Survey respondent



Comment from
Tony Kilcoyne
Private dentist

The NHS dental system not being fit for purpose is the number one reason stressing dentists and their teams. It seems 28% of our profession are considering early retirement, with another 24% actively seeking to leave the dental profession altogether. Nobody can doubt this is a tragic waste

of talent and bad for patients and society generally. It is time those in power started acting preventively and responsibly to improve the NHS systems and professional satisfaction, instead of continual spin and 'kicking that can' down the road as conditions worsen around them.

UNHAPPINESS IS RIFE AMONGST NHS DENTISTS

Being happy in your work is a key driver of performance. So, it is worrying that happiness levels are so low amongst NHS dentists. This trend has worsened from the 2017 Confidence Monitor survey with those who are unhappy or very unhappy increasing in all seven areas.

View the results of all previous surveys at nhsdentistryinsights.co.uk

Q When thinking about working within the NHS, how happy are you that you...

...can provide the **level of care** that you want to your patients?



...have enough **time to manage patient expectations**?



...are **fairly remunerated** for the work you do?



...achieve the level of **job satisfaction** you'd like to?



...can do your job within your **agreed working hours**?



...are able to carry out your work without feeling **overly stressed**?



...are able to achieve a good **work/life balance**?



Across all seven happiness questions, the average percentage of NHS dentists saying they were either **unhappy** or **very unhappy** was:

86%

307 respondents working predominantly within the NHS

- Very happy
- Happy
- Unhappy
- Very unhappy

PRIVATE DENTISTRY PAINTS A MUCH HAPPIER PICTURE

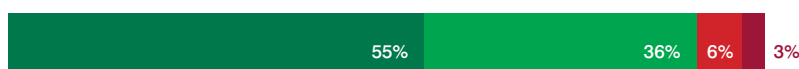
In stark contrast to working within the NHS, it seems that dentists working in private practice are far happier, with results almost a mirror image of those from NHS dentists. When given the opportunity to expand their answers, private dentists talked about having more time to communicate with their patients and a greater opportunity to carry out a more fulfilling and wider range of dental treatments.

Q Compared to when you were working in the NHS, how happy are you that you...

...can provide the **level of care** that you want to your patients?



...have enough **time to manage patient expectations**?



...are **fairly remunerated** for the work you do?



...achieve the level of **job satisfaction** you'd like to?



...can do your job within your **agreed working hours**?



...are able to carry out your work without feeling **overly stressed**?



...are able to achieve a good **work/life balance**?



Across all seven happiness questions, the average percentage of private dentists saying they were either **happy** or **very happy** was:

83%

188 respondents working predominantly within private dentistry

- Very happy
- Happy
- Unhappy
- Very unhappy

HAPPINESS LEVELS BETWEEN NHS AND PRIVATE DENTISTS ARE ALMOST POLAR OPPOSITES



Comment from
Tony Kilcoyne
Private dentist



Comment from
David Houston
Owner of the Houston Group
of dental practices

These latest survey results are worrying in the sense that they are consistent with other reputable surveys like the BDA's, but also show a worsening trend. 86% of the dental profession do not see their future working within the NHS system in the next five years. Those who have reduced their dependence upon the NHS dental system actually increased their happiness and job satisfaction hugely, where 83% feel happy or very happy in their work.

The ability of private sector practitioners to self-determine and control such aspects of an individual's working life as treatments offered and personal targets to be achieved linked to fee-setting abilities, obviously allows a better work/life balance and an improved income all leading to a more satisfying career. Nevertheless, as not everybody can work in the private sector, the scale of the dissatisfaction for so many members of the profession must be a cause of considerable and serious concern to those with the ability to influence and address such unhappiness.

“ *Those who have reduced their dependence upon the NHS dental system actually increased their happiness and job satisfaction hugely* ”

Tony Kilcoyne

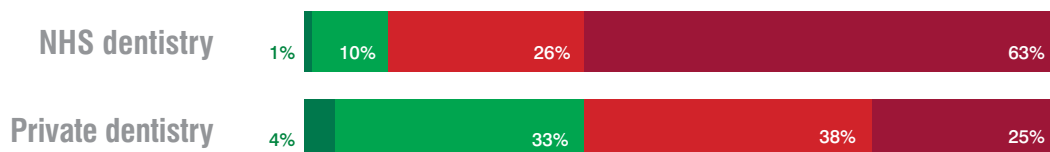
I left the NHS for private practice nine months ago after nineteen years service. I do not regret leaving the NHS for a minute and should have done it years ago. It has become an unworkable situation. I felt so stressed, I would cry in the car on my way home.

Survey respondent

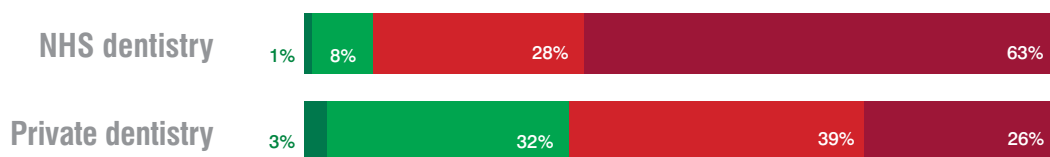
ANXIETY LEVELS ARE HIGH ACROSS THE DENTAL PROFESSION

Anxiety levels are high across the profession with many dentists working in fear of complaints and litigation. However, there is still a big divide between NHS and private dentistry with more than twice as many private dentists saying they do not feel anxious in comparison to NHS dentists.

Q How anxious are you about the risk of complaints when working within...



Q How anxious are you about the risk of litigation when working within...



Q How anxious are you about your ability to meet the standards set by the GDC when working within...



■ Not at all anxious ■ Anxious
■ Not very anxious ■ Very anxious

307 respondents working predominantly within the NHS

188 respondents working predominantly within private dentistry

On average, NHS dentists are more than twice as likely (63% compared to 26% in private dentistry) to feel very anxious about complaints and litigation.

The NHS treadmill just gets faster and faster. Litigation is ridiculous. We are trying to do our best in a terrible system.

Survey respondent

63%

26%



Comment from
Stephen Hudson

Private dentist and author of *The Dentist's Survival Guide*

These results reflect a country that is now a toxic environment for dentists. Those in the NHS need to convert where they can, and those who are private need to realise that they should be filtering and selecting the patients they treat based on their ability to establish rapport. Patients generally don't sue dentists they like and respect!

One GDC case can potentially end your career and the indemnifiers can abandon you if it is in 'the benefit of their members'.

Anxiety is generally reduced in private dentistry. That's because private dentists don't have NHS managers monitoring their every move and they don't have the threat

of clawback. They can charge a proper fee for the treatment being delivered, and they can spend the time they need to get to know the patient and build a positive, long-lasting relationship. There is a big difference between treating patients when you have proper time and remuneration, to a situation where funding and time are limited and you have non-clinicians watching your every movement.

You also have to remember that 'patients' tend to not value something that is free or cut price. If patients don't value the service, they aren't going to respect the treatment being offered.

If I was an NHS dentist, I would start moving towards the EXIT.

“ *Anxiety is reduced in private dentistry. That's because private dentists don't have NHS managers monitoring their every move* ”

HIGH LEVELS OF ANXIETY COMES AS NO SURPRISE



Comment from
Simon Thackeray

Private dentist

The results about anxiety levels in dentistry do not come as a surprise to me. We are still living in a climate of fear, made worse by the ease with which payouts seem to be made by the indemnity providers, and then the increasing number of stories we hear about dentists having their subscriptions hiked to a degree that is unaffordable or being dropped by the company with little explanations. It is perhaps unsurprising then that this causes a huge degree of uncertainty and paranoia amongst all sectors of the profession, since there is little transparency when decisions like this are made, which leaves dentists wondering if a complaint about them will leave them high and dry when they need the reassurance that their career and livelihood is not going to be irreversibly damaged.

Anxiety levels are greatly reduced in those practising private dentistry. Within private practice, there is generally far more time available to engage and discuss matters with patients. Consent is therefore a more straightforward process, and explanations of procedures can be more detailed and allow the patient to understand THEIR problem. In addition, my

experience is that these type of patients do tend to value their professional advisors more appropriately. It is far easier to develop a good rapport with them, and this seems to be one of the keys to reducing the risk of litigation and complaints. You often don't value something that you don't pay for, and whilst NHS dentistry is not free, it is certainly not priced in the manner that means everyone values it correctly. I'm fairly sure this then fosters resentment from some patients, which immediately means you are on the back foot as a professional in that relationship, and a complaint is (in my opinion) more likely as a result.

The worst case scenario of course is that there will eventually be no one left willing to do dentistry and then the public will suffer as a result. Whilst this might seem a fantasy, I have never personally known of so many people leaving the profession or actively looking to in my twenty-seven years of practise, so is this as far fetched as one thinks? The results of the survey seem to confirm the thoughts of many of us, that the morale within the profession is at an all-time low.

“ *The results of the survey seem to confirm the thoughts of many of us, that the morale within the profession is at an all-time low* ”

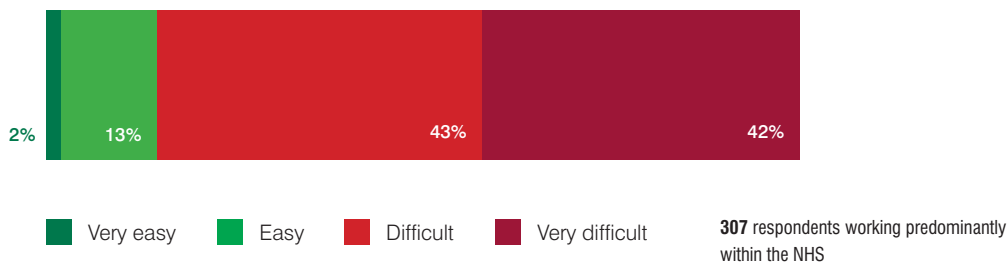
I strive to provide a reasonable level of care to my patients, however, pressures on all fronts are increasing.

Survey respondent

CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF NHS DENTISTRY IS LOW

Many NHS dentists feel that it is very difficult to balance their own professionalism and standards with the pressures and constraints put on them by their NHS contract. This is a contributory factor to an overall lack of confidence in the future of NHS dentistry.

Q The NHS aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism. How easy do you find it to balance professionalism and working within an NHS contract?



Q As a percentage, what is your confidence level that dentistry has a long-term future within the NHS?

(0% being no confidence and 100% being extremely confident)

NHS respondents : **307**

Private respondents : **188**

25%

28%

Results are the mean result - all scores divided by the total number of respondents.

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IMPACTS THE FUTURE IN TERMS OF RECRUITMENT



Comment from
Joe Hendron

NHS dentist & owner of a former prototype practice



Comment from
Dev Patel

Dentist, practice owner and NHS contract holder

The recruitment crisis has been continually denied by NHS England. Yet look at the number of job vacancies in East Yorkshire. Look at the number of contracts which are being handed back, including some inner-city practices, because they are unable to recruit new dentists.

Brexit and the scaremongering associated with it is also going to be a challenge to NHS dentistry. We hear that European dentists are returning to their home countries - we need reassurance now that our foreign workforce can be confident that they have a good future working in the UK.

I also believe the profession will struggle to recruit the next generation of dentists. The stress of targets and the anxiety surrounding the threat of complaints and litigation is causing young dentists to practise defensive dentistry and putting them off undertaking complex treatment, which at times may be best for the patient.

A lot of young dentists are also against the idea of being forced to hit UDA targets as a way of remuneration and are moving towards private dentistry as an alternative.

“ *Look at the number of contracts which are being handed back, including some inner-city practices, because they are unable to recruit new dentists* ”

Joe Hendron

The sooner I can leave dentistry the better. With pressures from possible litigation, red tape and ineffective/aggressive governing bodies it is no longer a career I want to be in or would recommend.

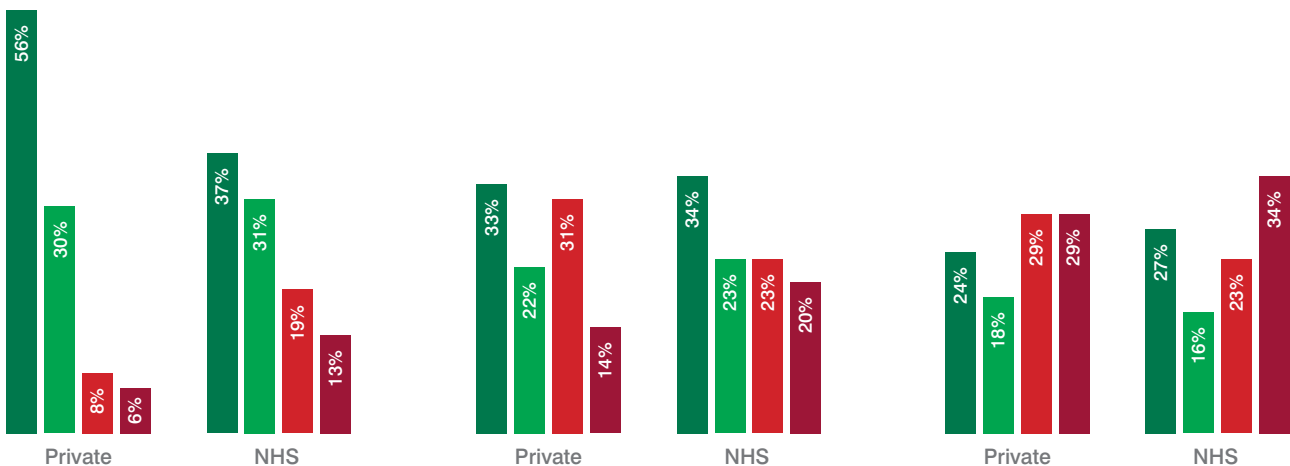
Survey respondent

OVER THREE QUARTERS OF RESPONDENTS WOULD SUPPORT A GOVERNMENT MOVE TO A CORE SERVICE FOR NHS DENTISTRY

If the Government were to consider a move to a 'core' service, the majority of dentists surveyed said they would support a service that caters for vulnerable groups and those unable to pay, but would not go as far as to support dropping dentistry in its entirety from NHS provision.

Q How likely are you to support the Government in any of the following changes to NHS dentistry provision?

Very likely Likely Unlikely Very unlikely



Option 1

A core service

available to vulnerable groups and those who cannot afford to pay charges

77%

Likely or very likely to support across NHS and private

23%

Unlikely or very unlikely to support across NHS and private

Option 2

A core service

providing treatments in emergencies only

56%

Likely or very likely to support across NHS and private

44%

Unlikely or very unlikely to support across NHS and private

Option 3

No NHS dentistry

no dentistry available on the NHS at all

42%

Likely or very likely to support across NHS and private

58%

Unlikely or very unlikely to support across NHS and private

IS A CORE SERVICE THE ANSWER?



Comment from
Eddie Crouch

Dentist and Deputy Chair of the British Dental Association PEC

There is a misconception among the profession that having a core service will mean more money to spend on a core service. The worry at the BDA is that if you have a core service the funding changes to core funding and it doesn't guarantee that the funding available now is concentrated into that.

If Dentistry is to be starved of additional resources it should be focussed on providing real prevention for the young and the elderly, so children are not having general anaesthetic in hospitals and the elderly in care homes are not suffering dentally as they are at the moment - which is a real scandal in a civilised society.

“ Dentistry should be focussed on providing real prevention for the young and the elderly ”

I believe NHS dentistry should be a core service to those who are exempt and everyone else should pay. A capitation system would be a good idea and payment should reflect those who have high or low risk disease activity rather than have one size that fits all.

Survey respondent

A core NHS service coupled with a sensible and workable preventive based NHS contract would be the best way forward.

Survey respondent

At the end of the NHS Confidence Monitor survey respondents were given the opportunity to add their own comments. We have selected a representative sample of the comments below.

We are in very testing times. Huge waiting lists and patients receiving poor treatment. We need to allow for professional development and longer appointment times for younger dentists to achieve the standards we all wish to aspire to.

““””

“ I’VE NEVER BEEN SO UNHAPPY AT WORK.”

I am surprised that the profession is not protesting more against the current awful system.

What the NHS expects us to deliver with ever increasing overheads is impossible to marry up.

““””

I am so glad I’m at the end of my career, not at the beginning.

““””

“ For the level of funding available, there is no chance that dentists can provide a proper dental service to the British public. A major rethink is necessary. ”



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