

SHOCK HORROR

Roger Matthews

The Daily Telegraph was quick to report that “one in four dentists is earning over £100,000” when the NHS Information Centre reported earnings figures for 2009-10 earlier this month.

As usual this misses the point (and indeed distorts it). The article failed to point out that Associates - who outnumber practice-owning dentists by a factor of more than two to one - by and large, earn significantly less than this, at around £65,000 a fall of more than three per cent over 2008-9 figures.

It also failed to point out that practice owners, who have shouldered the greatest expenses in complying with CQC and HTM, have also suffered a loss of net income compared to the previous year.

Despite this, gross income did rise slightly at this time, but as the above figures demonstrate, more and more of practice revenue goes into the expenses element, to meet not only the regulatory costs, but also the rising cost of staff wages following the mandatory introduction of registration for dental nurses in the previous year.

Materials, laboratory and capital equipment costs are also rising steeply, as the pound has suffered against the dollar and euro, with most of these items being imports.

There is always the implication, too, that at a time of constrained NHS expenditure, dentists are profiting unduly. This entirely misses the point that the figures used in the report include private fees and indeed income from all sources, and that the private dental market has continued to grow over time.

There are, I'm sure, many readers who like me have had occasion to use legal services recently and who recognise that such fees will frequently be based on hourly charging rates in excess of £200 (and significantly more in many cases).

Our legal colleagues do not have the technical and regulatory expenses and overheads we face, but I have yet to see an OFT market report challenging lawyers' costs. It's all too easy to target our profession, it seems to me.

[334 words]

-ends-

Notes to Editors:

Roger Matthews MA BDS DGD (UK) FDSRCS(Edin) - Chief Dental Officer

Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.