

Light and the end of the tunnel

Steve Gates

As spring gathers pace and the days begin to lengthen, those of you in England and Wales may finally have begun to see a little light at the end of the tunnel of 'paperwork' generated during the preparation for CQC registration and HTM 01-05 essential requirements.

But the acronym CQC is still guaranteed to send dentists in England into a stress-induced frenzy. I think it's fair to say that the introduction of a 'level playing field' on quality and safety was welcomed by the majority of dentists. However, the errors and inconsistencies that have plagued the introduction of this regulation for primary dental care have certainly driven most to the brink.

The CQC regulations were brought forward by the Health and Social Care Act 2008 - which was originally intended for institutions such as hospitals, which deal with life and death situations on a daily basis and should, rightly, have more stringent procedures in place to ensure the wellbeing of their patients. Trying to make this legislation fit with both the CQC and the dental profession as a whole has, therefore, been more than a little difficult.

We may not like the CQC's approach, but having lobbied hard against the principle, there remains a duty of care to make sure that dentists receive the most appropriate and valuable assistance. Some have seen this as 'siding with the enemy', but after a lot of fist-shaking it became apparent that CQC registration was inevitable and the most important thing became helping dentists find their way through the minefield.

Practices in Northern Ireland and Scotland are on the brink of taking similar steps but will hopefully now benefit from the experiences of their English and Welsh colleagues to guide them through the process.

Now, however, there is a new and possibly even more controversial proposal in the pipeline, in the form of the Health Bill. Since its publication, the Bill has seen massive criticism from both the healthcare professions and the general public.

This could be seen as a welcome reprieve for the dental profession, but with PCTs on the way out and new reforms already causing major upset within the NHS, I can't help but wonder what this means for the new dental contract in 2014? The pilots currently underway will give some indication as to what to expect, but I strongly suspect that a capitation scheme will eventually win-out, with separate remuneration for complex treatment.

This sounds like a great idea in principle and a concept very close to my heart, but economic necessity will mean difficult times for public healthcare funding and the private sector will not go completely unscathed as a result. We all recognise that there are economic realities and it seems likely that 2014 will be set to see yet another upheaval in dentistry. So enjoy the sunshine for as long as you can as there may be another tunnel to contend with sooner than you think.

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About the Author:

Steve Gates – Denplan Managing Director

As Denplan's Managing Director since 2001, Steve is responsible for the overall strategic direction and growth of all its activities, in association with the Denplan Board and other Executive Leadership team members. He works particularly closely in areas of new product and business development, while maintaining hands on links with the dental profession.