

## **In the Rinse Cycle**

**Roger Matthews**

As the Health Bill continues (or rather doesn't continue) its bumpy passage through parliament, what are we to make of the current confusion and argument over Healthcare England?

It now looks as though PCT clusters may be here to stay, possibly alongside GP consortia, and with Local Health and Wellbeing Boards now seeming to have higher priority, where will 'little dentistry' sit?

Will the National Commissioning Board mark a return to centralised contracting, or will some element of local management remain? And how much of the £20 billion saving will be achieved as all these bodies, and others, lobby and jostle for position?

Rather like the Icelandic dust clouds, it seems that our own Pilots are stuck on the runway until the Air Traffic computers are finally fired up and working, but is their flight plan actually determined?

There have been far too many question marks in this piece already, but they are as nothing compared to the question marks hanging over health policy – and that is the 'rinse cycle' that dentistry will be inexorably pulled into.

Of one thing there can be no doubt, and that is that budgets are to be severely constrained by comparison with anything we have known in the past. The word 'cut' has yet to be uttered by any Health Minister, but the Kings Fund's Chief Economist, John Appleby has crunched the figures and come up with 'real terms' reductions of about 1% in England (higher in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) for NHS spending by 2014.

Compared to the growth we have seen in the past this is the most significant turn-around ever seen.

It has been commented that a recent TV programme critical of dentistry was overwhelmed in comparison to a similar exposé of the treatment of the elderly in care homes. But the brutal truth is that neither topic – although the latter is utterly more distressing – features largely in articles about health, where heart attacks and cancer therapies are seen as far more newsworthy and exciting.

But the majority of spend is on chronic disease management – and that includes us, surely?

**-ends-**

**350 words**

**Notes to Editors:**

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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.