

Man The Barricades?

Roger Matthews

To judge from the tone and content of many publications, the UK dental professions are in a seething turmoil of discontent.

Dentistry, it seems, is under attack from many quarters. Infection control regulations (HTM in England, SHTM in Scotland etc) will, it's estimated, cost practices half a billion pounds to implement fully, while healthcare regulation (CQC in England, HIW in Wales, SCRC in Scotland and RQIA in Northern Ireland) are set to deal a bureaucratic hammer blow to the hard-working practitioner.

Re-reading the above, it may be that there's something to be said for relocating to the Isle of Man which seems to sail on regardless (and without, I believe, epidemics of dentally spread disease or anarchy in the streets). But I'm told you have to have special permission to set up there, maybe that's why.

To a great extent I have sympathy with this reaction – the beleaguered profession struggling against overwhelming officialdom. I certainly believe that much of the guidance is illogical and disproportionate.

But never let the facts get in the way of a good story. Recently the *Daily Mail* (no I don't read it, I just get the clippings) ran a story on how England was “the most crowded country in the EU”. Leaving aside for a moment that it's the UK, not England, which has EU membership and that vast tracts of the Highlands and elsewhere are mercifully people-free, the journalist went on: “Only Malta, with four times the population density, is more congested”.

OK, so how come England (sic) is *the* most crowded, if the next sentence tells us somewhere else is?

So, as I've perused at length the outpourings of the various regulators, I come to the conclusion that in their own, unwieldy, verbose and oh so politically correct ways, there is actually something to be achieved here.

Don't recoil in horror – I'm not endorsing all this stuff wholesale. But there *is* to me, at least, a point in ensuring that all healthcare is provided with the patient, and the patient's health and wellbeing, at its centre. Patients do deserve to be communicated with, to have their consent sought, to be cared for as well as treated for their disease or condition.

Even though we know that vastly more patients acquire healthcare-related infections as in-patients than will ever suffer even a minor issue with their dentistry, which is not a reason to ignore the public's right to be treated in a clean environment and with instruments which minimise – according to our current scientific understanding – the risks of transmissible disease.

I was struck, during a nine-month long series of meetings about infection control, by just how many practices were actively seeking to demonstrate their compliance, not with the minimal standards laid down in England, but with best practice.

Similarly, I have been impressed with dentists' response, in mainly private practices, to the Care Quality Commission's up-coming registration processes. Many have said that while it will, no doubt, be an onerous task, they will have the satisfaction of knowing that their standards are in line with, or exceed, expectations.

I just wish they would all make it a tiny bit simpler for busy practitioners and their management teams to understand. I recognise how difficult it is to avoid ambiguity in official statements, but if the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, who is chairing a Committee on cutting bureaucracy for business, could get everyone to summarise on one sheet of A4, it would be a welcome start.

[587 words]

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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.