

The State of Things to Come

Steve Gates

Looking at the state of things to come, I can't help but notice that the vast majority of dental practices are now successfully registered with the CQC; the dental pilots to improve the NHS contracts are underway, even the craziness of the BDA Conference and Exhibition is disappearing into the recesses of my memory. Now all we need to do is conquer this pesky recession and we'll be home free...right?

Well I would love for that to be the case, but nothing is ever that easy is it? The CQC has said that it is not looking to close down dental services, but must assess all regulated establishments according to the Health and Social Care Act 2008. The main worry for dentists is the CQC Inspectorate's apparent lack of experience or knowledge and, given its structure, we're all expecting some significant irregularities, especially in the early months and years.

The CQC has stated that while all dental practices will, under the terms of the Act, be assessed formally at least once every two years, this assessment may not necessarily include a physical visit to the premises. Telephone or email assessments may suffice where there is no evidence to suggest that non-compliance is an issue.

The CQC assures us that visits to dental practices will be pre-booked and agreed in almost all cases, but we've already heard from dentists who, following an assessment call with the CQC, have been told they will be subject to an 'unannounced' inspection visit. This just goes to show the highly variable approach which we can expect in an organisation of this size.

Furthermore, despite the fact that most practices have successfully registered with the CQC, only 20% have actually had their application fully assessed and Notices of Decision sent out, and it's likely to be some time before this happens. It is also likely to be early autumn before the assessment of dental premises will commence, which does afford practices some time to get organised at least.

To maintain a constant monitoring of compliance, the CQC will have an ongoing programme of surveillance and this will be summarised in a Quality and Risk Profile (QRP) for each registered entity.

Although help and guidance is often at hand with issues such as compliance with CQC Standards and HTM01-05, it seems as though the culture of regulation will be playing a significant role in things to come for the dental profession. So, let's just hope that the recession won't!

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