



A white paper on

The Future of Dentistry

Executive summary

April 2021



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Denplan is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist with around 1.4 million patients and more than 6,600 member dentists. We were formed by dentists for dentists, and our goal is to help more people have better oral health because we believe this is essential to better everyday health and wellbeing.

We partner with private dental practices to provide affordable dental care plans to their patients – making it easy for people to access regular dental care and proactively maintain their oral health. Importantly, these dental plans are created by dentists to suit their patients' individual needs.

The last year has raised significant challenges to dental professionals, with the COVID-19 pandemic having exacerbated existing issues facing the sector, including by increasing financial pressures and mental health concerns on dental teams. This is likely to have a lasting impact on the profession.

Against this backdrop, late last year we carried out a survey of our member dentists to identify the biggest challenges and opportunities facing dentists themselves, as well as their patients, both in the short and longer term. We then hosted a roundtable discussion in February with dental practitioners, academics and policymakers to further understand the impact of these issues on the sector.

The themes uncovered in our survey and discussed at our roundtable have formed the foundation of this report: understanding of private dentistry; the impact of COVID-19; the importance of good oral health; technology and innovation; and issues affecting the dentistry profession, such as mental health and wellbeing.

While we have identified significant challenges facing the sector, we also believe that there is reason to be optimistic about the future. Dentists and their teams are hard-working dedicated professionals, who want the best for their patients. They are embracing technology and they want to learn new skills and undertake training to continue to develop.

However, in order to ensure that dental professionals remain motivated, policymakers must properly support them to do their jobs and maintain a healthy work-life balance. This is something that needs to be addressed urgently, not only to improve the wellbeing of dental teams, but also because such issues might impact negatively on patient outcomes.





To achieve this, we have set out a series of 14 recommendations in this report, which we urge policymakers to implement as soon as is practically possible.

1. Government must recognise the specific impact of COVID-19 on private dentistry, and the role played by private dentists in tackling the backlog of cases it has created.
2. Government should be more sympathetic of the issues and pressures facing private dentists and seek to work more collaboratively with the private sector to ensure common goals are met.
3. All future dentistry guidance, whether COVID-19 related or otherwise, should be issued by the appropriate national body with the relevant jurisdiction and be clearly applicable to mixed and private practices, not just those wholly working with the NHS.
4. Government must enable dental practices to resume their full range of services in England and across the devolved nations as soon as is practically possible.
5. Government should play an active role in communicating to the public the importance of dental hygiene and routine check-ups in maintaining oral health, both during the pandemic and beyond. Whilst there has been an increase in demand for urgent and emergency care, there has been a significant drop in patients attending routine dentistry due to stay at home orders. This will only serve to grow the backlog of demand dentists need to meet in the next 12 months.
6. Private and mixed dental practices must not be excluded from the ongoing government financial support available to NHS practices as the ongoing impact of the pandemic continues to threaten their long-term sustainability.
7. The VAT exemption for PPE must be extended to reduce costs for dentists as they attempt to support their patients throughout the pandemic.
8. Government should do more to recognise and communicate to the public the value of regular dental visits for both their oral and overall health.
9. Government should provide training and resource to support all dentists to deliver one-to-one diet and lifestyle interventions.
10. Government should encourage and enable all dentists to adopt a proactive approach to maintaining oral health for all patients, both NHS and private.
11. Government should undertake a centralised assurance and compliance process to create a list of approved providers of video consultation systems, similar to the one carried for GPs.
12. The Department of Health and Social Care should encourage NHS Digital to explore the possibility of a wider roll-out of Summary Care Records (SCR) to support dentists to play a greater role in improving population health post-COVID-19.
13. Government must work with the sector to safeguard the profession and ensure the workforce is resilient, supported and engaged. This must include increasing the numbers of placements, boosting financial support for dental students, and strengthening training and professional development that is available to dentists throughout their career.
14. The vital role played by dental nurses and the wider dental team should be acknowledged and clear training pathways mapped out.