

COVID-19 Dental update 25 March 2020

In QCS, we know that there is guidance for much of health and social care, but still a lot of unanswered questions for dentists and their teams.

The BDA and authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have all recommended that routine treatments cease and emergency only services are provided. The current advice in England is that some regular care can continue, despite the country now being in lockdown, which does create a huge challenge.

The British Dental Association are seeking clarity on which patients can be seen safely with limited availability of protective equipment. Without proper PPE and protocols, there is a disproportionate risk to the safety of patients and dental teams that can no longer be permitted to continue. NHS practices have not been given any assurances from government; private practices are being denied access to wider business backing, and individual dentists are mostly self-employed.

Contract and practice closure

If your practice can't meet its UDA obligations, make sure you have notified the area team of the force majeure event as required in your contract, so the practice will not receive a breach notice for any breach arising from COVID-19. In England, at present, the underperformance due to COVID-19 is then carried into the next contract year.

If you close the practice, you need to advise the CQC, and you must send a closure notification to the local area team to prevent breaching your NHS contract. You also need to notify your patients.

Staffing

If your practice needs to close or reduce staffing levels, it may be that your staff can undertake other tasks, such as CPD. However, if there is no other work your staff can do during the period of closure or reduced access, you may need to:

- a. Agree with employees that they are furloughed workers, as part of the government scheme to keep staff employed on 80% pay
- b. Lay off employees on guarantee pay
- c. Agree with workers that they work reduced hours for proportionately reduced pay
- d. Consider making staff redundant

Furloughed workers

The government is prepared to pay up to 80% of the wage costs of workers who are not needed at this time, up to a maximum of £2,500. At this stage, we do not know whether this scheme will extend to self-employed workers, such as some hygienists and therapists.

You may, with their agreement, designate employees as furloughed workers. This includes employees who are currently self-isolating. You can then submit information to HMRC about the employees that have been furloughed and their earnings through a new online portal that HMRC will set out.

Further guidance is expected on this soon, and we will share this with you as soon as we can.

As soon as support packages are in place from the Government and the NHS, we will make sure that you have the right advice and where possible we will provide documents to help you and your teams.

Tracy Green
Head of Primary Care