Direct Access – Sally Simpson talks about the journey so far...

29 March 2013

I was delighted to be in attendance at the General Dental Council meeting yesterday that saw our regulator recognise the further contribution we can make as an appropriately qualified and competent dental team member to the oral health of the nation. Being granted permission to treat patients within our scope of practice without a referral or prescription from a dentist will lift previous barriers to oral care and enable our population increased choice in who delivers their dentistry, and access to the quality care and the particular skills provided by dental hygienists and dental therapists.

The decision has been long awaited by the profession and as Immediate Past President of the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy, an organisation that campaigned so hard in support of direct access for its members and profession, I am delighted to finally see this ground breaking change in the way we are permitted to practice supported and accepted by our regulator.

How did we get there?

BSDHT initiated discussions with the GDC regarding direct access and invited BADT to become part of this which led to the presentations to GDC Council Members at Chandos House in spring 2011, and the subsequent joint BSDHT and BADT proposal to the GDC which discussed direct access for BOTH dental hygienists and dental therapists.

The Society did have some concerns at the time of writing the proposal regarding the safety of direct access around restorative dentistry. These concerns surrounded the laws that do not currently allow us to prescribe dental radiographs, an assessment tool essential for accurate caries identification, or sell, supply and use prescription only medicines (POMs) without a patient group direction (PGD) or a patient specific direction (or prescription) from a dentist.

BSDHT has worked very hard to support its members through these challenges and was the first organisation to produce a PGD for use in general practice available only for its dental hygienist and therapist members. This enables both dental hygienists and therapists to customise a template PGD to work in both Private and NHS environments without the need for a written prescription from the dentist for every patient when POM’s are required.

BSDHT has also been in on-going contact with health departments to lobby the need for changes in legislation that will remove the barriers to current oral care that dental hygienists and therapists have.
I am delighted by the decision that both dental hygienists and therapists will have direct access to patients for their full scope of practice from 1 May 2013 and am fully supportive of this decision. I know that BSDHT will work closely with the GDC, Health Departments and Indemnity Providers to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible and lobby for the current barriers challenging both dental hygienists and therapists be lifted.

The vote in favour of direct access is a monumental breakthrough for our profession and one which I know the Society will embrace and support wholeheartedly.

Sally Simpson
BSDHT Immediate Past President