

BRIEFING PAPER
SOCIAL POLICY STRATEGY GROUP

Progress on Dental Health Strategy

Background

The Dental Health Strategy Group was formed in October 2002 with the following membership:

Mr Mike Cassidy (Chairman), H&SS, Consultant in Restorative Dentistry, Manager - Community Dental Service
Dr Duncan Nicholson, H&SS Assistant Medical Officer of Health
Dr Barbara Hayward, Consultant in Dental Public Health, West Midlands
Mr Andrew Heaven, H&SS, Health Promotion
Dr Jeremy Willetts, President of the Jersey Dental Association (JDA)
Mrs Janice Waddell, Employment and Social Security

The group has met three times since October 2002, most recently on 24 March 2003. The Terms of Reference are to review the provision of dental services in Jersey, with the exception of the specialist services of Oral Surgery and Orthodontics.

Dr Barbara Hayward, Consultant in Dental Public Health from the West Midlands, has produced a document (previously circulated) which summarises the dental epidemiological surveys carried out in Jersey from 1987 to the present time, and this has provided invaluable information about the trends and attitudes in respect of dental health on the island. This gives us a background to our local dental disease levels and establishes an evidence base which we are using to develop our strategy.

Progress to date

The Dental Health Strategy Group has identified the particular groups within the population for the focus of the strategy:

- a) children under the age of 11
- b) children who require dental extractions under general anaesthesia
- c) institutionally bound people in both States' funded and privately funded accommodation
- d) free-living elderly on a low income
- e) primary school children in individual schools, i.e. screening
- f) poverty groups
- g) dental phobics
- h) adults and children who have special needs

Process

Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme

The group is reviewing the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme, now in its 9th year of service. This appears to have a high administrative cost relative to the number of patients and the cost of treatment episodes carried out. Currently, there are 1415 members (as of 31.12.02) on the scheme, the total budget is £145k of which £110k is spent on patient care and £35k on administration.

Support for the elderly

Similarly, although the Jersey 65+ scheme for optical, dental and chiropody care is in its first 18 months of service, the uptake is slow and the cost efficiency is not fully established. As of 28.2.03, there are 1558 members. In respect of both schemes, we are looking to see if a way can be found to get better value for the available funding.

Hospital provision for children under 11

Another area under critical review is the present set up at the dental department of the General Hospital, where any child up to the age of 11 may access free dental care, irrespective of parental means. It has been suggested that this service should be *means tested* and available only to those in the lower income groups whilst those children from more affluent homes would have to seek treatment at full price in the high street.

Options are being explored in this area to evaluate the impact of charging on take-up of dental care and the mechanisms and costs for administering such a system. At present, we have no information on the family incomes of the children who use the hospital's service, and it is unclear how much would be saved by excluding these children and how this would affect their access to dental care.

It has been identified there would be difficulty in policing the system at the point of delivery in the Dental Department. Care would need to be taken that any system would not result in confrontations with parents presenting at the hospital with children in dental pain, only to be assessed as ineligible and turned away.

Consultation with General Dental Practitioners

Dr Jeremy Willetts, President of the JDA, is the representative of the body of High Street dentists on the Dental Health Strategy Group. It is anticipated that there will be a range of views within the 40 or so General Dental Practitioners in the community and the group has taken the view that there should be wider consultation. To that end, Dr Barbara Hayward is currently drawing up a questionnaire which will be circulated to every dentist on the Island to seek their views on current States' dental services, inviting suggestions to improve service gaps. The questionnaire and work of the Dental Health Strategy Group will also be on the agenda of the May meeting of the JDA.

Feedback to date indicates that one such gap may well be the limited help available to phobic patients, for whom General Anaesthetic and/or sedation is available, but for the dental extractions only, and if restorative care is necessary the patient has to pay the full high street price for this care under sedation. Current legislation requires dentists to be specifically trained and hold a full range of resuscitation equipment before carrying out sedation and there is only a very limited number who are fully compliant with this legislation.

Next Steps

The results of the questionnaire will be processed by late summer which means that a draft of the Dental Health Strategy will be available perhaps by the early autumn of this year.

The target date for the completion of the Strategy is now October 2003.

Mike Cassidy
17 April 2003