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Dental Council welcomes orthodontic working group report

The Dental Council is pleased with the results of a one-year inquiry into orthodontic treatment provided by dentists, which has resulted in recommendations to improve the delivery of orthodontic services to patients.

The inquiry was undertaken by a working group set up by the Dental Council last year in response to concerns, many anecdotal, about the provision of orthodontic services by general dentists. The Dental Council released the working group's report today.

The inquiry found no evidence of widespread harm or risk to patients.

Dental Council Chair Robin Whyman, who also chaired the working group, said the Council responded proactively to the concerns to ensure it had a good understanding of the scope of the issue.

"We wanted to ensure orthodontic patients were receiving safe and appropriate treatment. We were particularly concerned due to the young age of the majority of orthodontic patients."

Dr Whyman said the working group, which included a lay person and an advocate for young people, as well as representatives of the various professions involved, undertook a thorough inquiry, analysing complaints data from the Dental Council and ACC, as well as seeking targeted information from a range of key stakeholders.

The group found the vast majority of general dentists offering orthodontics did so safely and within their capabilities and competence, Dr Whyman said.

"After careful analysis, the group confirmed concerns around orthodontic treatment involved only a small number of patients and a very small number of practitioners. The group also noted that orthodontic treatment has a limited risk of serious, irreversible harm.

"However, although the size of the issue is small, the young age of the majority of orthodontic patients makes them particularly vulnerable. The group has identified a number of measures which we can take to further safeguard patients from potential for harm."

The group made 12 recommendations, all of which were accepted by Council last week. The recommendations, which can be found in full on p.6 of the report, are focused on the following main areas:

- education and training of dental graduates working in orthodontics
- information for the public
- advertising of orthodontic treatment
- ongoing monitoring of this area of practice.

Council staff are now developing an implementation plan, which will set out options for the Council to action the recommendations. Dr Whyman said the Council had prioritised developing educational material aimed at the public which would offer guidance for choosing a provider for orthodontic treatment.

"In the meantime, patients should talk to their dentist or orthodontist and make sure they fully understand their proposed treatment plan, and alternative options. As a patient, you need to feel comfortable that the treatment plan is the right one for you and that your provider is the right person to deliver it. You can always seek a second opinion if you are unsure."

Dr Whyman said the Council was pleased with the report and the process followed by the working group.

“Overall, we are confident that this work will result in the improved delivery of orthodontic treatment to the public, and we thank everyone who was involved with the inquiry and the resulting report,” Dr Whyman said.

Read the full report here.

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