

Friday, 04 December 2020

Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3SQ

Re: Community Dental Services (CDS) – Temporary regional rate for additional hours

Dear Minister Swann MLA

I am writing in relation to [DoH determination no 12 CDS TCs](#) issued on 18th November 2020 indicating the temporary regional rate for additional hours.

The CDS in Northern Ireland are extremely disappointed, not only that the 1.33 rate determined is lower than that proposed by BDA at 1.6, made upon invitation by the Department of Health, but that the timeframe and process allowed no formal opportunity for meaningful engagement on the determined rate. The lack of clarification regarding the outworking of the direction is also of concern.

The determination was unilaterally issued without prior engagement or agreement, as a fait accompli and without sufficient cognisance of BDA Northern Ireland Salaried Dentists Committee as the authorised negotiating body. Moreover, the lack of transparency around Department of Finance's role in this process failed to respect BDA's negotiating role, and is extremely concerning. This is the most recent chapter in a disappointing history of engagement by Department of Health and Department of Finance with the CDS in Northern Ireland.

In consequence, the goodwill of the CDS service has been decimated after delivering care, without knowledge of what or when staff might be paid for additional non-contracted hours worked, over the past 9 months during a pandemic. They have been treated despicably, and morale has been significantly damaged over an issue which should have been resolved much more adequately, and much more sooner.

Unfortunately, given the low imposed rate for working outside of contracted hours, no additional TOIL, significant burnout and poor communication from the Department of Health, the appetite for undertaking additional working hours has now evaporated. Whilst CDS remain fiercely dedicated to their patients, this latest culmination of factors and the need to

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re-establish their own vital services, mean staff feel they are no longer able to provide cover in the UDCs, and many have advised that their services will be withdrawn.

The mass withdrawal of CDS involvement in UDCs is a direct response to the wholly unsatisfactory process regarding the enhanced rate that has ensued. The dysfunctional and convoluted process is to blame for the unsatisfactory situation we now find ourselves in, 9 months later.

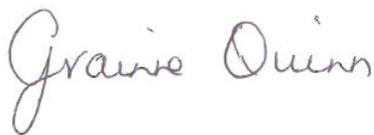
We are under no illusion that the Health Service is under greater pressures than it ever has been before, and CDS colleagues have borne more than their fair share of these pressures for the good of their patients.

We trust you will accept that this determination -and the process that has led to it -has created avoidable damage in staff morale, and for staffing UDCs.

We would urge you as Minister to work with your Finance Minister colleague to examine how a repeat of this episode could be avoided in future. More timely and adequate ways of addressing pay issues are absolutely essential, and it must never fall on faceless bureaucrats to issue unilateral settlements on staff that shows little respect to the Community Dental Service.

We look forward to your early response on this matter.

Kind Regards



Grainne Quinn
Chair, NI Salaried Dentists Committee

Cc: Mr Conor Murphy, Minister of Finance