GDC Engagement event 29/30th May 2019 Cardiff City Hall.

On arrival, the attendees were split into 4 groups. These were Government & Regulators, Education, BDA/LDC chairs and a public group.

I attended the BDA/LDC chairs group along with Katrina Clark, Adam Porter, Dave Johnson and Caroline Seddon. Several topics were discussed with a summary below (although it’s not brief, sorry).

1. We discussed registration rates both in the context of overall rates and risk profiles between CDS/GDS dentists & therapists, hygienists, nurses etc currently grouped as DCP’s. It was specifically asked whether registration rates could reflect part time workers.

In reply Matthew Hill explained that this was something the GDC had considered as the proposed corporate strategy for 2020-2022. He was clear that this was not something which the profession had brought to the GDC as a concern. Currently the grouping together brings a degree of simplicity and does allow the rates for dentists and DCP’s to reflect the costs of regulating each. It was felt that further breaking down of the rates within the DCP’s grouping could make cost predicting more difficult with a sudden increase in costs for smaller groups such as CDT’s needing a dramatic increase in fees. Within the dentist group it is something they could look at further if the profession wanted this…. But if some pay less, others will pay more.

Essentially, they feel it is a trade-off between fairness and simplicity.

1. Caroline asked about mission creep by the GDC. Specifically, in relation to the research the GDC carries out. There was support for some of this research specifically around CPD but questions were asked over the workforce/Brexit/EU research.

Matthew was robust in his defence of the GDC explaining the money spent was modest and as a regulator they feel it is important they have a greater understanding of dentistry to make their regulation fairer and more proportionate as they try to rely less and less on FTP hearings.

Regarding the specific concern over the EU workforce issue again Matthew was robust in his response. He explained that the GDC had been warned that Brexit would likely lead to a collapse in EU registrants which could dramatically affect their funding stream. They had to do this research to understand the possible workforce implications as part of their aim to provide a 3-year costed corporate plan.

Currently EU registrants make up 17% of the dental register but are approximately 23% of the new registrants each year. The implication seems clear.

It was highlighted later in the discussions that further research and planning will need to be done in this area. If my understanding of the discussion was correct, currently European qualifications are recognised as part of an intergovernmental arrangement with the GDC simply ticking the box and placing them on the register if they have an EU dental qualification. It was explained that the standards of courses can be very different both within the UK and in the wider EU. The GDC recognises this and is revamping its inspections to bring greater consistency within the UK. As our relationship with the EU changes the GDC anticipate that they will need to further develop their own QA system for registration and they also recognise that this could bring them in to conflict with government as potentially workforce issues/government policy could come into conflict with patient safety. The latter must continue to be the main concern of the GDC.

1. Discussion was had over what drives the fear dentists have of the GDC, how the GDC is doing business differently and how the GDC could work with other organisations to try and reduce the regulatory burden on dentists.

Broad points were

The GDC are engaging more with the profession and have very positively engaged with students and new graduates.

Research has shown that these groups are overwhelmingly positive about the GDC which is in stark contrast to GDP’s in practice where the clear majority have a negative view. The insinuation was that these dentists then tarnish the view of the newer dentists!

It is felt by the GDC that there is a perception amongst dentists that it is when, rather than if you will find yourself being investigated by the GDC. This is overwhelmingly not the case. The average dentist is still very unlikely to find themselves in front of the GDC. They are keen to dispel this myth.

The GDC clearly cannot be political but it can look for lessons and themes in complaints and FTP cases and try to relate these to dental practice and dental contracting. It is increasingly trying to make the information it collates available to the profession. The Dental Complaints Service signposts most the complaints it receives with very few cases being opened and investigated. It was highlighted that they are seeing increasing numbers of complaints about orthodontics. These represent about 21% of complaints currently.

Regarding regulation as a whole, the GDC understood our comments that they could simply be the straw that broke the camels back. We are very heavily regulated and would like to see some sharing and learning across the regulators where appropriate to avoid conflict and duplication. They fully understand this and do recognise that within Wales they have work to do. They did highlight how this has been done in England successfully so they do have a model.

The GDC then had some questions for us.

1. Serial applications and their handling. Specifically, where would the profession like the line to be drawn between recouping some of the costs from the applicants to the register whilst not discouraging them altogether. It is clear that they do have a problem with those rejected serially applying which is very costly. A figure of around £5k was mentioned.
2. How can the GDC effectively engage with the profession and specifically the High Street dentist? They produce a lot of information and guides but they are well aware that the majority is unread.
3. Following on from this there is a consultation which was opened on 9th May and runs until 30th July on the GDC corporate strategy 2020-2022. How do they get us to engage with this? It is a fairly long read so they were at pains to point out that a simplified web based version will be launched soon

Finally….

There was a discussion at the end and a few topics came up.

Tooth whitening

The GDC has in the past pushed for prosecutions but they are currently stepping back whilst they look at the public’s perception. Questions asked were… Is this a service the public wants outside of the dental profession? If so should we be trying to facilitate this safely. This will be an area to watch.

Scope of Practice.

This is currently under review. It is recognised that their document is limiting at present and is interpreted very prescriptively. This then moved on the direct access discussions and the limitations that the NHS contract imposes on this. They were very interested in how contract reform in Wales is trying to address this. Work is ongoing and they encouraged us to watch for updates and consultation.

Overall I felt It was a very positive couple of days and that view was shared overwhelmingly by the attendees from right across the profession. The GDC certainly seems to be trying to make positive changes with its “Right Touch” approach and events such as this certainly put a more human face to the organisation. They do not have everything right and it is important that we still engage and lobby through the BDA and other such organisations where this is the case.

On a negative note, Matthew Hill is leaving the GDC in the summer and those that know more than I felt this was disappointing as he has been good for the GDC.

On a positive note the registration rate will reduce to £730-£750 per dentist. DCP’s looks likely to be £130 (currently £116).

Link below is to the consultation on the corporate strategy.

https://www.gdc-uk.org/api/files/GDC%20Corporate%20Strategy%202020-2022.pdf