

## Criminals profiting from crisis in NHS dentistry

The British Dental Association has said government must step up and honour its pledges to save NHS dentistry, as new evidence shows scammers are now active targeting patients across the country desperate to access care.

News comes as *Good Morning Britain* heard from Jacqui Nicholson from County Durham in November who was desperate for an NHS dentist after a two-year wait and fell victim to a scam she found on a website promoted by someone she trusted on social media. She paid £53 each for appointments for herself and her husband, reassured by the NHS logo, prepayment option, and a detailed email confirmation. When she discovered it was a scam, Jacqui contacted her bank but feared her refund claim might come too late.

Needing urgent dental care, she felt deeply embarrassed, saying, 'It looked so real... I

even Google Mapped it.' Her advice: 'It's hard to tell what's real and what's fake. Don't fall for it.'

The BDA understands fraudsters have already targeted patients in Norfolk, Essex, Suffolk, Devon and Merseyside using professional looking websites to secure pre-payments of up to £319.10 for care.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Criminals are now preying on desperate patients left with no options. We need real urgency and ambition from Labour on NHS dentistry. Fraudsters will keep seeing real opportunities as long as the new Government's promises remain unkept.'

Health Secretary Wes Streeting told *Good Morning Britain*: 'I want to thank the British Dental Association for raising awareness of these kinds of scams, and we'll be looking at what more we can do within the law to clamp down on that. They've done the

public a real service this morning in giving some practical advice and help to avoid other people being taken in.

'But Eddie Crouch is also right that we need to stop the rot in NHS dentistry which has been allowed to continue for far too long. Eddie was just in the Department this week, with the British Dental Association meeting the Minister for Care.

'Now the Chancellor has set the budget and the spending review totals for the next few years, we can negotiate the dentistry contract to deliver on our manifesto commitment of 700,000 more urgent dentistry appointments, but also to do the wider fundamental reform that NHS dentistry needs. So we will continue those negotiations and report back.'



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## GDC publishes report on causes of death during Fitness to Practise investigations

The General Dental Council (GDC) has published a new report on dental professionals who have died while Fitness to Practise (FtP) concerns were investigated or remediated.

The report, the first of its kind for the GDC, covers the period 2019 to 2022. During this time, 20 dental professionals died while their cases were active, with causes of death categorised as natural, external, or unspecified, and one subcategory of suicide. The GDC has taken steps to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

The report has included deaths in the subcategory of suicide when 'suicide' was listed on the death certificate or notification. By convention, death certificates in Scotland and Northern Ireland do not use the word 'suicide' or any synonym of it. Deaths that occurred overseas have been categorised as unspecified.

Lord Toby Harris, GDC Chair, said: 'The report serves as a call for everyone in the dental sector to reflect on the environment, systems and processes involved in being a dental professional. It took longer than we expected to complete the work and some of the issues have been complex, but we have delivered process improvements in parallel and taken care to ensure we can be confident in the data reported.

'Every death is a tragedy, and when the data and what we are doing to improve FtP are put aside, what is left is the death of people, some in tragic circumstances, and we must consider the families, loved ones and colleagues for whom the pain and hurt are still very raw, and we offer them our condolences.'

Len D'Cruz, Head of BDA Indemnity said: 'This is a long overdue report, demanded by the profession over a considerable period of time in response to the many tragic deaths related to a GDC investigation.

'The GMC were far more responsive in doing their own reviews. One suicide is too many and the important thing is for the GDC to recognise the impact their processes have on the lives of caring dental professionals. Of great concern still is the inordinately long delays for a case to be concluded, the unconscionable silence that characterises these long periods of time when nothing seems to happen and the impenetrable bureaucracy that many registrants facing FtP investigation have to deal with.

'We can only hope the lessons are learned and changes implemented with some urgency.'

Dr George Wright, Deputy Dental Director at Dental Protection said: 'While this long-awaited report makes for difficult

reading, it is the first step in understanding the extent of this problem and we see this as a breakthrough initiative.

'It also builds on other recent progress to improve fitness to practise processes, such as the review of correspondence sent to registrants during an investigation, the implementation of a pilot to expedite the resolution of simple cases, and the review into the amount of information released publicly when the Interim Orders Committee is considering FtP concerns.

'There is however much more to be done, and we hope the much-needed transparency on deaths during FtP investigations will continue, with regular reporting of this data combined with ongoing efforts by the regulator to further reduce the impact of its investigations.

'Reform to the GDC's outdated legislation is essential to reduce investigation delays, which we know significantly impact mental wellbeing. Reform could give the regulator greater discretion to not take forward investigations where allegations clearly do not require action, so it could then focus on the most serious allegations and process them faster. The Government must expedite the reform of the GDC.'