

accrued knowledge. It is incumbent on all PEC members, new and old, along with the Trustees to ensure the heritage, our heritage, is not confined to permanent storage, but open again as soon as possible for all to research and enjoy.

B. Williams, Hon. Secretary Lindsay Society for the History of Dentistry, London, UK

Martin Woodrow, Chief Executive Officer, British Dental Association, responds: The emphasis PEC candidates chose in their election addresses is clearly a matter for them individually, but of course the director role for which they were seeking support includes a significant breadth of responsibilities.

We should reassure though that the BDA Board as a whole understands the significance of the BDA library and museum. Post-move out of Wimpole Street, we continue to offer members a full library loans service, both physical and electronic. We know that this offer continues to meet the needs of the vast majority of members using the library. The museum collection is currently in storage, but we are now turning attention to a long-term solution to displaying it in the future.

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Community dentistry

Supporting the CDS workforce

As a Community Dental Officer, I witness daily the resilience of colleagues delivering care to society's most vulnerable – patients with complex medical needs, severe dental anxiety, learning disabilities, or those requiring sedation or general anaesthetic (GA). This work demands not only clinical expertise but deep ethical commitment.

Despite the vital role Community Dental Services (CDS) play, workforce morale remains low.

Systemic pressures create fertile ground for moral injury – when clinicians cannot deliver care they believe is right, due to constraints beyond their control. In the 2025 study 'Valuing and retaining the dental workforce', one clinician described feeling 'like a hamster on the wheel... constantly chasing UDA's', as resource limits forced prioritisation of throughput over patient-centred care.¹

Unlike high-street practices, CDS often work with stretched teams, ageing infrastructure, and limited access to sedation or GA. These issues fuel long and growing waiting lists, especially for domiciliary care, paediatric GA, and comprehensive dental treatment. Patients with significant needs face unacceptable delays.

When placed in this context, the risks are magnified. In CDS settings:

- Clinicians may witness patients deteriorating while awaiting care
- Distressed families appeal for help the system cannot deliver
- Complaints arise when expectations go unmet, yet staff feel powerless
- Repeated exposure erodes morale, professional identity, and retention.

BDA survey data show that only 20% of practice owners and associates rated morale as 'high' in 2023, down from 40% in 2015.² For community dentists, the situation is compounded by poor career progression. Moreover, nearly a third are considering retirement within five years³ – a stark warning of workforce decline.

In many trusts, opportunities for leadership remain limited, despite the

skilled nature of the work. We cannot address oral health inequalities without supporting those delivering this care. Improving morale demands more than funding – it requires addressing ethical strain. Solutions must include embedded psychological support, flexible working, protected CPD time, and structured progression pathways.

As calls grow for a national workforce plan, CDS must not be overlooked. We are not an adjunct but a cornerstone of NHS dentistry, especially as referrals from general practice rise. Future planning must recognise our essential role and deliver meaningful reform. Crucially, the moral and emotional toll on clinicians must be addressed. Without urgent action, the system risks becoming unsustainable, driving burnout and workforce loss. If we are serious about equity and timely, safe care for vulnerable patients, supporting the CDS workforce must be a national priority – not an afterthought.

To protect the patients we serve, we must first protect the professionals entrusted with their care.

J. Patel, Wolverhampton, UK

References

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