

CQC reassurance about constructive approach

Last month, I publicly invited the CQC to provide reassurance that they intended to work constructively with the dental profession in order to make the new regulation work, and to ensure that any practice deemed to be non-compliant would be given a sufficient period of grace to ensure that remedial measures could be taken before any publication suggesting non-compliance. What could be more reasonable?

Well, Cynthia Bower, their CEO, duly responded in the last issue of *Dentistry*. Her reply addressed the concerns I raised, but in such a way that it was somewhat unclear as to what extent she was wholeheartedly giving the assurances I was calling for. As with everything, it all comes down to interpretation. I leave it to you to judge...

Minor concerns will be discussed and resolved where possible at the time of the review. Dentists will have a chance to check the factual accuracy of compliance reviews before publication. A 28-day 'representations process' will be allowed, should the CQC intend to publish a condition on registration – i.e. a statement of non-compliance. Does this mean that dentists have 28 days to make sufficient remedy and to convince the CQC that they have done so, in order to stop such adverse publication? Is this actually what Ms Bower means? Is this a sufficient period for dentists to make such remedy, especially if the timing coincides with holiday periods?

A quick perusal of the CQC response in isolation may sound as if they intend to be reasonable, a possible indication of a constructive way forwards. However, if one actually goes back to the CQC website, the whole description of this 28-day representations process certainly does not seem to be written in terms that reveal any intentionality that this is a period for dentists to take remedial action and correct matters before the CQC go public. Indeed, if one goes on to look at the CQC Follow Up Report template and guidance issued last week, the impression given is very different, and has the tone that it is the inspectorate's task to expose all they can without delay. Indeed, the template says: 'When we have completed a review of compliance, we publish a report on



News comment

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our website as soon as possible setting out our findings and judgements.'

It is clear that they will be doing so, regardless of the appeals process, and thus practices run the real risk of having their reputations damaged by the unchallenged judgement of a non-dental bureaucrat. The fact that the provider can appeal to the First-tier Tribunal does not offer comfort of any fast resolution of an unfair situation, and all the time the practice's reputation will continue to be traduced. I suppose that the trouble lies in that the CQC believes they have already been clear enough about how to achieve compliance in publications to date, such a feeling not necessarily being shared by the profession. Do you believe you have been given a clear idea? Do you believe calls to the CQC helpline have unequivocally cleared up any confusion? Do you feel that Ms Bower's response was clearly reassuring to the profession?

Ms Bower states that fully compliant providers 'should welcome these regulations, as registration will be an endorsement to their practice'. Well, how many of you whose patients are, in any event, perfectly happy with your professional services welcome the prospect of paying £1,500 per annum to be duty bound to a new set of bureaucrats for an endorsement that you do not want, and that patients will not particularly understand? Well, lots of questions, and I have my own views as to the answers... Why not write to the editor with your views?