

The wonders of CQC regulation



News comment

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Well, I can't really say 'I told you so' – rather, it is more the case that 'we all told them so'.

The House of Commons Health Committee's ninth report has recently been published concerning its findings on CQC regulation. I think that the word 'damning' would not be too unfair to describe their conclusions. While I agree with much – if not most – of their report, I think that to be fair minded one would also be just as damning about the Parliament who passed the Health & Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2010. A huge amount of the blame for this bureaucratic mess must lie at the door of the poorly devised, ill-drafted legislation that dictated that dentists should all be regulated from April 2011, despite the fact that they were already regulated by the GDC.

Having said that, the CQC has not exactly covered itself in glory as to how it has managed the process. The report clarifies that regulatory compliance visits dropped dramatically over the last year as the CQC had been too busy dealing with the mindless process of 'registration'.

Now, most dentists (but not apparently all) are registered and paying their £800 for the privilege. But, in the same way that the process of getting to this stage meant that a very large proportion of beneficial regulatory compliance just did not happen for all of those health providers already registered, exactly the same will happen when it comes to the registration of general medical practitioners. Registering tens of thousands of primary medical providers will have the same – but bigger – effect, and the CQC will again be unable to cope, although you will still be paying £800 per annum for this bureaucratic pleasure.

A year ago I found myself at the head of something of a protest about CQC registration of dentistry, indeed with a letter published (with nearly 400 dentist co-signatories) in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the resultant accompanying article exposing the whole mess. I wrote to a significant number of 'movers and shakers' in the dental profession urging them to join me as co-signatories, but the general response was 'No, it is too late to argue as it is already laid down in law that dentistry will be regulated in April 2011'. I admit that, following the letter and the article, the BDA belatedly carried out its postcard lobby exercise, but this was too little too late.

So, now we see that the realisation of the current hopeless state is such that:

a) the head of the CQC admits that they 'had worked with speed at the expense of quality' as the number of compliance visits has collapsed

b) the Committee felt that 'it was astonishing that it could ever have been considered sensible for small dental practices to work through the same process as a large hospital' and that this process was undertaken without any of the necessary pilots

and c) the government has now decided to delay the CQC registration of GMPs for a further year.

Well, forgive me for pointing out the obvious, but here we see that a delay of CQC registration for doctors has taken place despite the fact the timescales were already laid down in law, just as was the case last year with dentists. Had all of the 'movers and shakers' in dentistry actually had the courage, things could have turned out very differently for our profession too.

So here we are; dentists are paying £800 a year with the prospect of the CQC being totally bogged down with registering doctors, rather than producing added value for dental patients.

A year ago I spoke out fairly strongly, and lobbied my MP and the health minister. So did countless individual dentists. I suspect that we all received the same platitudes in similar wording, effectively brushing us off. Well, it is interesting to now see a House of Commons Health Committee finally admitting that there is something of a fiasco about the whole affair.