

PRESS RELEASE



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PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE - SAYS MDDUS

Dentists are being urged by MDDUS to step up efforts to encourage regular attendance amongst patients to stop painful dental problems before they develop.

The UK-wide dental defence organisation is advising dentists to drive home the benefits of frequent visits to the dental surgery. Patients who fail to attend regularly risk developing significant dental problems which can cause a lot of pain both physically and financially.

It follows the publication of a survey which showed that fear of the dentist or the cost of treatment has prevented more than a third of Scots from getting their teeth checked in five years.

The study, for dentists' group The Implantium Network, also found that 8 per cent of people have not had a dental check-up because they are worried about the problems the dentist might find.

Another 7 per cent said they had not been because they are frightened of the dentist and 8 per cent said they could not afford it.

Aubrey Craig, head of the dental division at the MDDUS says: "The facts show that many patients only attend the dentist when in pain or when something untoward has happened to their teeth.

"But dentists have a duty of care to all their registered patients to recommend they attend for a preventive examination on a regular basis.

"Changes in the guidelines recommending recall intervals, applicable to different parts of the country, leave this to the discretion of the dentist to determine recall intervals. Patients must be told of the appropriate timeframe for them to reattend for examination – which will depend upon disease history, compliance with treatment etc."

Craig stresses that the onus is on the patient to attend the surgery for examination. "It is not the responsibility of the dentist to 'remind' patients to attend, but to recommend a regular period for examination. Traditionally many dentists did send reminder cards to patients detailing necessity to attend. However the current financial restraints affecting the public and private purse may well see dentists no longer adopt this practice. Advances in technology may now offer dentists alternative methods of communication, other than the postal service."

MDDUS is well aware that many patients fear the dentist and this affects attendance, but Craig says there are ways dentists can make the experience less stressful.

He says: "In all honesty it is not everyone's favourite place. However dentists are now providing methods such as conscious sedation in their practices, or can source a colleague who provides this service.

"This may involve 'gas and air' or the more complex procedure of intravenous sedation. Either way, these additional services can allow a huge number of otherwise terrified patients to receive routine dental care and prevent more serious problems developing.

"Many dentists are trained in this invaluable service provision. Conscious sedation allows the otherwise phobic patient to receive dental care in the familiar surroundings of their own practice by a dentist in whom they place their trust."

On the issue of cost, Craig adds: "Although dental costs may seem high, fees in the NHS are set by the Dental Rates Study Group.

"A small investment on a regular basis by any patient should hopefully prevent significant costs for a neglected dentition in the future."

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For further information contact Colin Calder on 0141 616 2677 or 07850 510881.

Note to editors

MDDUS (Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland) is a medical and dental defence organisation providing access to professional indemnity and expert medico- and dento-legal advice for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals throughout the UK. For further information on MDDUS go to www.mddus.com.