

# Contracting with General Dental Services: a mixed-methods study on factors influencing responses to contracts in English general dental practice

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**Declared competing interests of authors:** Professor Rebecca Harris reports a grant from the Department of Health to her institution, the University of Liverpool, for work outside the submitted work, in relation to evaluating pilots of the new NHS dental contract.

**Disclaimer:** This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published June 2015

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr03280

## Plain English summary

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Health Services and Delivery Research 2015; Vol. 3: No. 28

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr03280

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## Plain English summary

The NHS dental contract is an agreement between dental practitioners and local health service managers (until very recently Primary Care Trust commissioners) which sets out the type and amount of dental care they have to provide in exchange for a certain amount of money. The terms of the agreement have changed a number of times since contracts with dentists were first set up, because dentists have reacted to new contract rules in ways that were against the wishes of managers. Loopholes have been exposed where practitioners appear to exploit vagueness in the language of the contract to benefit their self-interest. Our study focuses not on the terms of the contract, but on describing what the self-interested view of dentists is, in contrast to commissioners, in order to better understand what an ideal form of contract should set out to achieve. We studied 16 dental and six medical practices in detail, as well as sending a questionnaire to dental practitioners. We compared dentists with medical practitioners to draw out issues which are particular to dental practices. We found that dentists have several concerns which they have to bear in mind in their work: being responsible for keeping the practice going for the sake of staff and patients, providing high-quality care according to professional standards, meeting management requirements such as targets set by managers and running their practice as a business in a profitable way. We found some of these aspects can conflict with each other, and with the main concerns of commissioners.

# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 09/1801/1055. The contractual start date was in October 2010. The final report began editorial review in December 2013 and was accepted for publication in August 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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