What is Direct Access in the UK?

The General Dental Council (GDC) regulates the dental team and defines the Scope of Practice\(^1\). In May 2013, the GDC removed barriers to Direct Access (DA), allowing dental hygienists (DHS) and therapists (DTS) to carry out their full scope of practice without prescription from the dentist.

DA contributes to principles of Prudent Healthcare, a Welsh Government initiative aimed at improving the patient experience through providing targeted, appropriate care and treatment by appropriately trained professionals:\(^2\)

“Only do what only you can do”

Method and Sample

A survey was sent to all DTHs and DHSs on the Wales Deanery training register.

- 160 responses were received:
  - 116 GDS; 39 CDS; 5 HDS; 20 Other
  - 80% were dual-qualified Therapists/Hygienists.

“Are you planning to use Direct Access in your role?”

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<th>DT</th>
<th>DH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in future</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already using</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently unsure</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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Not planning to use because of:
- Management/local authorities unsupportive.
- Insurance implications.
- Lack of demand in practice.

67% said that they would benefit from additional training supporting Direct Access

Top 5 most identified training needs

- Diagnosis, 64%
- Referral protocols and pathway, 49%
- Treatment planning, 47%
- Prescribing radiographs, 46%
- Investigation and referrals, 42%

The Direct Access Update course for DH/DTHs

A 3-day course was developed to help develop and underpin knowledge and practical application skills for DA, and enhance collaborative practice. The course mixed didactic lectures and hands-on clinical sessions.

15 delegates took part. Participants completed a practice portfolio in their workplace.

Evaluations completed at the end of each day and summatively at the end of the course.

- The course was filled within one week of advertising, suggesting it met a current educational need.
- Evaluations suggested the course was valuable and interesting.
- Participants benefited from discussing issues with professional colleagues.

Met their expectations: 13 Yes / 2 No
All subject areas were covered: 11 Yes / 4 No
7 of the 15 participants requested refresher courses on specific clinical skills areas.

Two more courses are planned with minor amendments following feedback

Conclusions

- There are still a number of issues with Direct Access yet to be resolved (e.g. prescribing medicines and the NHS regulations about opening a course of treatment). However, there are areas where skill-mix of oral health care provision can be utilised effectively to improve services for patients.
- Wales is taking forward DA proactively in contrast to the rest of the UK.
- “DA Update” is the first course of this kind in the UK and will be repeated for the workforce to improve skill-mix oral health care delivery and ensure standards of care are at an optimum.

References