

For immediate release

13 March 2015

91% of dentists believe they are more likely to be sued now than five years ago

A Dental Protection survey of over 700 dental members reveals that nine in 10 respondents believe they are more likely to be sued now than five years ago.¹ Of those, 81% believe the rise in media coverage of clinical negligence is the main reason, followed by high patient expectations (58%) and workload making it difficult to provide the best care (28%).

The survey also reveals that 72% of respondents are fearful of being sued by patients, with this fear impacting on the way 81% practise dentistry. This is not without foundation as 42% of survey respondents had received a claim for clinical negligence during their dental career and 66% knew a colleague who had been involved in a claim.

The survey also found:

- Of the 42% of members who had received a claim, 42% had received the claim in the last two years, 24% three to five years ago, 18% six to ten years ago and 16% 11 years +
- Being involved in a claim impacted on members' stress/anxiety (83%), morale (65%), confidence (55%) and health and wellbeing (55%).

Kevin Lewis, Dental Director at Dental Protection said:

“Dentists are facing immense pressures, including rising patient expectations, heavy workloads, complex treatment options and a stream of negative media coverage. A fear of being sued added onto the shoulders of dentists will not only impact on the individual, but also more widely on the practice of dentistry.

“Being sued can significantly damage the health of dentists. In our recent survey, 83% of respondents stated that their involvement in a claim impacted on their stress and 65% felt it impacted on their morale. It is not just if a dentist is sued directly but their experiences of seeing colleagues go through the process that can also cause anxiety, affect their confidence and lead to them practising defensively.

“It is encouraging to see that if something does go wrong, 64% of members believe an effective complaints procedure within the practice can help to reduce the likelihood of being sued. The reality in today's environment is that dentists should expect to receive and act upon more complaints about their care, but it cannot be right that they work in fear of litigation. In this challenging environment, we remind members that we are by their side at every step of their career, offering advice and education – we are much more than a last line of defence.”

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For further information or to arrange an interview with Kevin Lewis please contact Kim Watson on +44 (0) 207 399 1428 or email kim.watson@mps.org.uk

Notes to editors

1. Dental Protection conducted a survey of dental members to find out about their experience and awareness of claims for clinical negligence and how it had impacted on them. The survey ran from 19 February 2015 to 5 March 2015 and received 741 responses.
 2. Dental Protection Limited is registered in England (No. 2374160) and is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Medical Protection Society Limited (MPS) which is registered in England (No.36142). Both companies use Dental Protection as a trading name and have their registered office at 33 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0PS.
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Our in-house experts assist with the wide range of legal and ethical problems that arise from professional practice. This includes clinical negligence claims, complaints, medical and dental council inquiries, legal and ethical dilemmas, disciplinary procedures, inquests and fatal accident inquiries.

Our philosophy is to support safe practice in medicine and dentistry by helping to avert problems in the first place. We do this by promoting risk management through our workshops, E-learning, clinical risk assessments, publications, conferences, lectures and presentations.

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