



Benefits and risks of direct access to treatment by Dental Care Professionals: a rapid evidence review

Mr Steve Turner^{a,b}, Dr Steve MacGillivray^c, Ms Sheela Tripathee^a

^a Dental Health Services Research Unit, University of Dundee; ^b Edinburgh Postgraduate Dental Institute, University of Edinburgh, ^c Social Dimensions of Health Institute, University of Dundee

AIM

To evaluate the likely impact, including benefits and risks, of allowing patients direct access to treatment by dental care professionals (DCPs), in order to inform the GDC's future policy.

BACKGROUND

The General Dental Council (GDC) takes an evidence based approach to policy and commissioned this rapid evidence review in May 2012 to evaluate the likely impact, including benefits and risks, of allowing patients direct access to treatment by DCPs.

Current GDC regulations require a patient to see a dentist prior to treatment by DCPs (ie dental hygienists, therapists, nurses, technicians, clinical dental technicians and orthodontic therapists), who make up over 60% of the dental workforce.

Many non-UK dental care systems permit direct access with varying training, scope of practice and supervision requirements. Direct access also occurs in other areas of healthcare, e.g. to nurse practitioners.

METHODS

Two parallel literature reviews (dental and other health fields). Fig. 1 shows the dental review flow chart.

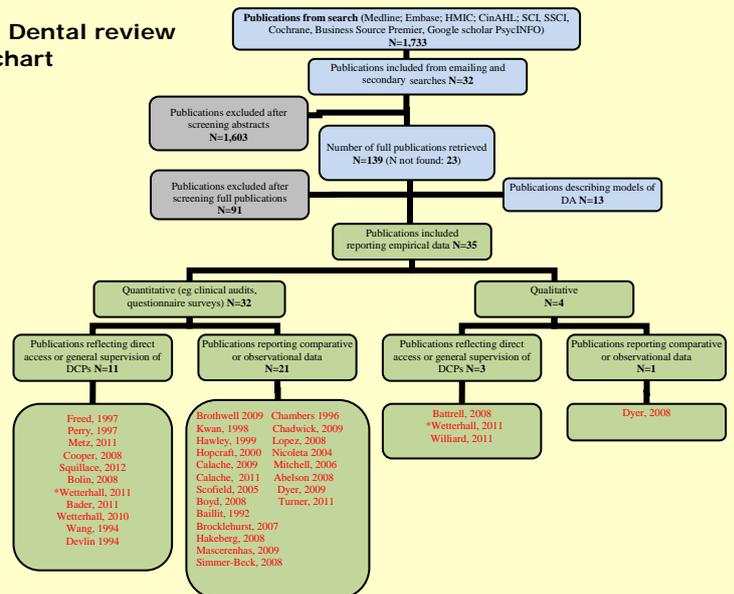
Enquiries to relevant groups and individuals worldwide.

Limited investigation in other fields, eg social work.

As a rapid review (35 days), analysis was limited to readily accessible full texts.

Databases searched: Medline, CinAHL, PsycINFO, SCI, SSCI, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Business Source Premier, Google scholar, using a systematic search strategy refined through an iterative process.

fig 1. Dental review flowchart



RESULTS

Over 5.500 abstracts were screened and over 100 relevant full texts, both dental and non-dental, obtained. After independent evaluation for quality and strength of evidence, 35 dental and 57 non-dental papers were included in the final analysis.

The review suggested the following potential benefits, risks and challenges of introducing direct access:

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- Increased access to preventive and restorative dental care with no evidence of increased risk to patient safety.
- High satisfaction amongst patients receiving care from DCPs.
- Cost savings to patients and the public purse.

POTENTIAL RISKS and CHALLENGES

- Some evidence of over-referring from DCP to dentist.
- Reported deficits in knowledge and support to patients regarding smoking cessation, diabetes and child/ domestic abuse among both DCPs and GDPs.
- Poor knowledge regarding the implications of direct access to DCPs among professionals and the public.

TRANSLATION TO PRACTICE

The Direct Access Rapid Review Report formed a significant part of the evidence base presented to and considered by the GDC Task and Finish Group. The GDC launched a public consultation in October 2012 on the proposal "Patients should have direct access to all registered dental professionals for the provision of any care, assessment, treatment or procedure which is within the registrant's scope of practice and for which they are trained and competent". The GDC will consider the outcomes of the public consultation. A decision is expected in March 2013.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The assistance of the organisations and individuals who contributed to this review is greatly appreciated.

The Report may be accessed at: <http://www.gdc-uk.org/GDCcalendar/Consultations/Pages/Direct-Access-Consultation.aspx>