

October 1st 2019

Re. National Oral Strategy

Dear Minister Harris,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Faculty of Dentistry of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (FoDRCSI) in respect of the new National Oral Policy, Smile agus Sláinte ('the Policy').

As you are aware, on August 26th last, FoDRCSI attended a meeting with several other relevant stakeholders to discuss the implementation of the Policy in the period ahead.

It has been subsequently outlined to us by Mr. Henshaw, that the immediate priorities for the roll-out of the policy are children under 6, an undergraduate training review and the assessment of needs of persons in residential services.

While stakeholders recognise the need for a new national policy which meets the needs of patients and the public, ensuring the implementation of this policy is effective, meaningful and ensures better access to and treatment of all patients requiring dental care must be the objective.

Given our remit in providing post graduate education and training to dentists in Ireland (we do not have a role in dental service delivery), our primary focus in respect of the current policy is on ensuring that all dentists are fully qualified to meet the requirements expected of them under this policy. This will, by extension, ensure that all patients receive the highest quality and safe evidence-based treatment.

We strongly believe for the proposed policy to be successful it must first lay the foundations for success. To do so, all stakeholders must ensure that the policy creates a training and post graduate education structure for dental professionals which equips them to meet patient needs over its lifetime.

At this time, we have significant concerns that this will not be the case.

Reforms needed:

We have previously outlined the key changes which are now required in the training and post graduate education of dental professionals, including:

1. The need for a mandatory system for CPD. Such a mechanism would allow Irish dentists a formal scheme in which to demonstrate to their patients that their knowledge and skills are up to date.
2. The need for a properly established and funded Dental Foundation Training/ Vocational Training Scheme. This would protect the newest members of our profession (dental school graduates) and help them make the safe transition from dental school to independent practice. Such schemes have run in the UK since 1993 and are supported by a wealth of independent research in relation to clinical competence, professional behaviours and developing self-confidence amongst new dentists.
3. Specialist/Consultant Matters: The FoDRCSI seeks the introduction of further specialist lists in dentistry beyond the existing lists in Orthodontics and Oral Surgery. The FoDRCSI also seeks funding of Specialist and Consultant training programmes (in a similar way that occurs in Medicine and Surgery) to provide the key future leadership within our profession and the Advanced Oral Health Care Centres envisioned in the new Oral Health Policy.

As we have previously outlined to you, all the above must be implemented to allow the Policy to fulfil the clinical and structural changes required under it.

These proposals also require legislative change, yet, to date, we have no evidence, that any efforts are underway to enact such changes. Indeed, the recently published legislative programme does not indicate that any legislative changes are currently being planned.

Without these essential reforms we do not have confidence that the National Oral Policy can succeed. Take just one element, the proposal for a network of advanced oral healthcare centres in dental hospitals. These centres cannot function effectively in the absence of the necessary education and training required to produce the skilled dental specialists to staff these centres of excellence.

We ask that you now action the reforms as we have outlined above and in the past, with legislative changes being the most immediate priority.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Marley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. John Marley
Dean
Faculty of Dentistry, RCSI

Cc: Dr. Dympna Kavanagh, Chief Dental Officer
Ms. Sarah Bardon, Advisor to Minister for Health, DoH
Mr. Finian Judge, DoH
Ms. Bernadette McDonnell, DoH
Mr. Peter Henshaw, DoH