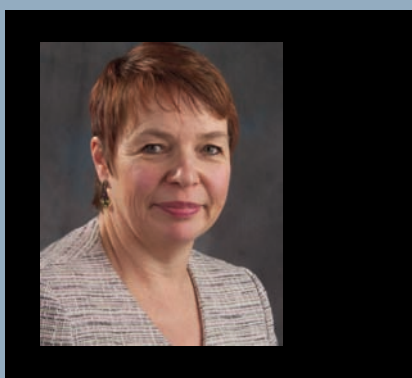


Special care dentistry



Faculty of Dental Surgery
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Special care dentistry (SCD) is defined by a diverse client group with a range of disabilities and complex additional needs. It is concerned with the improvement of oral health of individuals and groups in society who have a physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, medical, emotional or social impairment or disability or, more often, a combination of a number of these factors.

On 7 December 2005 the General Dental Council (GDC) approved, in principle, the establishment of a specialty of SCD. This is the culmination of a lengthy, and at times volatile, debate about whether there should be a specialty in SCD.

The debate started in the 1990s when the GDC and Department of Health (DoH) sought to formalise and regulate the provision of specialist care within the UK. A DoH review of dental specialties recognised the case for a future specialty in SCD. Shortly after this, the debate about specialisation in community dental

practice began. Discussions continued over the need for a specialty that would provide high-quality care for people with a range of primary conditions with recognised special oral healthcare needs and management requirements, as well as for formalised training and professional development in this field.

Consequently, in 1995 the Development Group for Community Dental Practice was established under the aegis of the Faculty of Dental Surgery. This group published a report that confirmed the need for further education and training, through a specialist framework, to improve and safeguard care for people with disabilities.¹ Independently and simultaneously, the Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education acknowledged that there was 'a strong case for formal education and training of dentists in the care of patients with special needs'.

In 1999 the dean of the Faculty established a working group in SCD to provide a broad-based, expert view to the Faculty later that year. The group recommended the establishment of a Joint Advisory Committee for Special Care Dentistry (JACSCD), which was established in 2000 as a free-standing committee to promote and oversee the introduction of training programmes, the development of curricula and training standards and formative assessment processes. Its documents, *A Case of Need – a proposal for a Specialty in Special Care Dentistry*² and *Training in Special Care Dentistry*,³ were produced in 2003.

The Faculty has also taken the initiative of developing a diploma in SCD, which

provides flexibility for candidates who wish to do the examination over a period of time by awarding it on the basis of marked assignments as well as a formal examination. Recently, the Faculty has given the green light to develop this examination to a higher level so that there will soon also be a membership examination in SCD.

All this, plus the competency document for Dentists with Special Interests (DwSIs) in SCD developed by the British Society for Disability and Oral Health and commissioned by the DoH, points the way to a structured NHS framework for the delivery of SCD.

Currently, people with disability and complex additional needs do not have the privilege of either equal access to oral healthcare services or equitable oral health outcomes. While they have similar patterns of oral disease to the general population, the evidence is that they have poorer oral health and poorer health outcomes from care. The development of a framework of care where general practitioners see the majority of people with mild and moderate disability, supported by DwSIs in SCD where appropriate, and specialists seeing those people at the more severe end of the spectrum of disability is a sensible way forward.

References

- 1 Development Group for Community Dental Practice. *Moving Forward – Establishing the Specialty of Special Care Dentistry*. London: Faculty of Dental Surgery; 1998.
- 2 Joint Advisory Committee for Special Care Dentistry. *A Case of Need – a proposal for a Specialty in Special Care Dentistry*. London: JACSCD; 2003.
- 3 Joint Advisory Committee for Special Care Dentistry. *Training in Special Care Dentistry*. London: JACSCD; 2003.