

“EURO DENTISTS' PLAN HITS HURDLE IN BRUSSELS “

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Herald Express Article

“The hoped for influx of Eastern European dentists to Devon to alleviate a serious shortage has failed to materialise because of delays in Brussels, it has been claimed.

Tory health spokesman Dr Andrew Murrison has tabled a number of probing questions to Health Secretary Dr John Reid amid evidence the anticipated arrival of an army of dentists from countries such as Poland shortly after its accession to the European Union on May 1, had not occurred.

"We were promised an influx of dentists from the EU accession states. Sadly this has not happened in the way ministers imagined," said Dr Murrison.

"The problem has been the registration process. There have been difficulties over whether their quality of training equates to that of UK dentists. The European Commission was meant to rationalise the system but has been slow to do that.

"It means that every single dentist from Estonia or Poland has to be rigorously checked out by the General Dental Council and that's taking a long time."

Dr Murrison, who is the MP for Westbury in Wiltshire, said eventually the European Commission would set up a checking system which would allow bureaucrats to be able to tell whether the qualifications of dentists from Eastern Europe were compatible with the UK system. "The whole dental system is a mess and while overseas dentists will help, serious problems remain. One of the problems is an NHS workforce review in 1970 suggested demand for dentistry would decrease because of things such as fluoridation of water. This has not happened and things are now beyond a joke," added Dr Murrison.

He is asking when the results of a follow-up review which was started two years ago will be published.

Dr Murrison is also seeking to find out how far the Government has progressed in its plans to bring in overseas dentists.

He has asked Dr Reid what estimate he has made of the number of dentists registered in Britain and when discussions on recruitment began with the governments of Poland, Germany, Denmark and Spain on the recruitment of dentists.

He has asked Dr Reid if he will list the countries the Department of Health is hoping to recruit dentists from and what incentives are being offered for them to relocate.

In Devon talks are at an advanced stage with five dentists from Poland who are expected to start work in Exeter and Teignbridge later this year.

There are also plans afoot to bring Polish dentists to Plymouth along with French dentists on a "tooth ferry" to the port.

The situation is so dire it is now almost impossible to find dentists taking new patients on the

NHS in the whole of Devon.

The dearth of dentists in South Devon has sparked the Herald Express' Time to Bite Back campaign.

Last night Anthony Steen, the Tory MP for Totnes said: "Despite Tony Blair's pledge in 1997 to ensure that everybody who needed an NHS dentist would get one, the Government has created a situation whereby pensioners, single parents and low income families and their children are now being struck off NHS dental surgery lists.

"The Government now proposes to create a similar crisis in other countries by stripping the health services of Eastern European countries of dental practitioners and luring them to the UK.

"Not only is this immoral, but why is the Government not seeking to attract our own dentists back to the NHS, and provide sufficiently attractive contractual terms to keep them there? We cannot have an NHS dental service on the cheap, and allow our nation's teeth to rot in the process.""