

THE POLITICS OF DENTURISM

Despite the efforts of many who seek to improve the position of denturists throughout the world there will always be some who will be unhappy whatever the outcome.

In any democracy it is the right of an individual to protest, lobby and use any legal means to achieve their ambition. Unfortunately, it is sometimes the minority who manage to achieve their aims at the cost of the majority and this is probably a worldwide phenomena. However, people often lose sight of the fact that legislation for any profession is mostly designed to protect the consumer and not the profession itself.

A recent example of this can be seen in the process leading up to the finalising of legislation for denturist/clinical dental technicians in the United Kingdom.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRITISH UNION

Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England were, historically, always individual countries as far back as the Dark Ages. Through a process of civil war and invasion Scotland, Ireland and Wales were conquered and ruled centrally from England. Several Acts of Parliament established the United Kingdom. In 1707 an Act of Union united the Parliaments of England and Scotland though Scotland retained its own church, education and legal system.

In 1746 a law was passed, by the English Parliament, stating that any Act that referred to England automatically included Wales.

A further Act of Union in 1800 joined England and Ireland as one and Ireland became officially governed by London.

Over the next two centuries various changes were made to the structure of the Union, significantly in Ireland, when the Ireland Act of 1949 created the Republic of Ireland in the south with Northern Ireland remaining under the control of the English Parliament.

More recently the English Parliament has steadily devolved power to each of these countries. Wales now has its own separate assembly which has limited powers to pass its own legislation.

In 1996 an international panel headed by former United States Senator George Mitchell attempted to end the deadlock over the political disagreements in Ireland. This resulted in the historic Good Friday

Agreement on a new form of self rule for Northern Ireland. However, this did not prevent further violence and the Assembly was suspended on October 14th 2002. There is now a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in the English Parliament, who is responsible for administering Northern Ireland.

In Scotland various attempts were made between 1889 and 1914 to establish some form of Scottish home rule. It was not until 1998 that the English Parliament passed the Scotland Act giving the new Scottish Parliament the powers to make its own legislation on education, certain health issues, transport, criminal/civil law, local government, housing, tourism, emergency services, economic development, agriculture and sports. However, such areas such as taxation, constitution, foreign policy, national security, international trade policy, nuclear safety and certain areas of social security remain within the power of the English Parliament.

Readers may wonder what all this has to do with denturism.

It is ironic that because of a quirk in legislation many members of Parliament sitting in the English Parliament are Scottish. Indeed, a large number of Secretaries of State are also Scottish-the Prime Minister himself is of Scottish origin. A further irony is that any changes in health legislation require the approval of both the English Parliament and the Scottish Parliament. Therefore we have the odd situation where Scottish politicians can vote on English legislation (and in theory prevent it going forward) but English politicians cannot vote in the Scottish Parliament. This situation has caused widespread debate and an argument that Scottish politicians should be prevented from voting on wholly English issues.

A recent case has highlighted this problem which could have had a dramatic effect on the legislation for denturist/clinical dental technicians in the whole of the United Kingdom.

As part of the legislative process bringing in registration for dental care professionals a subordinate legislation to open the professional registers was needed to pass through both the Scottish and English Parliaments.

However, a group of rival denturists who did not agree with the regulatory process managed to convince a Scottish Member of Parliament to object to this final piece of legislation. Once this objection is raised it requires investigation by the Health Select Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

On June 29th 2006 a Scottish Health Select Committee met to debate a motion to annul the legislation. Had this motion succeeded the whole process of dental legislation for the whole of the United Kingdom would have come to a grinding halt for at least the next 2 years.

Representatives of all United Kingdom Dental Associations were called to give evidence to the Committee.

The evidence put forward by the rival denturist association proved to be both misleading and incorrect prompting the President of the General Dental Council to say "I must comment on the Association for the Promotion of Denturism's written submission, much of which is naive, factually inaccurate and possibly disingenuous". All of the other dental associations took the same view and supported the General Dental Council President.

After further debate the Scottish Member of Parliament in question withdrew the motion for annulment and the legislation was allowed to pass.

Thankfully, we now have all the appropriate legislation in place and the United Kingdom register for denturists/clinical dental technicians opened on July 31st 2006. The first denturists/clinical dental technicians are expected to be registered early in 2007 once they have received their Royal College of Surgeons of England diploma. The qualification will be known as DipCDT (RCS) Eng.

This is a classic example of why all denturists should bury their differences and work together for the good of their profession and more importantly their patients. It is only when you have professional status that you can influence and improve the future of the profession.

C. J. Allen
Chief Executive
Clinical Dental Technicians Association U.K.