



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority

press release

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RQIA calls for new Dental Standards

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Today, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) called for specific standards for the use of intravenous sedation in dental practices in Northern Ireland.

Intravenous sedation allows for the treatment of anxious or phobic patients who would otherwise be denied access to dentistry. However, it is an area of dental treatment where patients' lives may be placed at risk if proper standards of provision are not maintained.

Publishing the findings of its *Review of intravenous sedation use in general dental practice*, Glenn Houston, RQIA's Chief Executive said: "**RQIA has identified significant variability in the quality of intravenous sedation provision in general dental practice. The review also highlighted that a lack of specific Northern Ireland standards has led to inconsistencies in the provision of intravenous sedation, and variation in training for dental teams.**

Mr Houston continued: "**Further concerns focused on the need for more robust monitoring of the provision of intravenous sedation, and the need for full compliance with the NPSA Safety Bulletin *Reducing the risk of overdose with midazolam injection in adults*, issued by DHSSPS in December 2008.**"

To address these concerns, RQIA has made a number of recommendations for action by the DHSSPS and the Health and Social Care Board. In addition, specific recommendations were also made to individual practices at the time of inspection.

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RQIA's Chief Executive concluded: "**Due to the levels of concerns identified within this initial review, a full review of intravenous sedation use in general dental practice is to be undertaken by RQIA later this year.**"

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Editors' notes

About RQIA

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is the independent body responsible for monitoring and inspecting the availability and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland, and encouraging improvements in the quality of those services.

What is conscious (intravenous) sedation

This is defined as 'a technique in which a drug or drugs produces a state of depression of the central nervous system enabling treatment to be carried out, but during which verbal contact with the patient is maintained throughout the period of sedation. The drug and technique used to provide conscious sedation should carry a margin of safety, wide enough to render loss of consciousness unlikely.' (Skelly, A.M. *Analgesia and Sedation*, in Watkinson, A. & Adam, A. (Eds) *Interventional Radiology*. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press, 1996: pp 3-11)

Background to RQIA's Review of intravenous sedation use in general dental practice

"*A Conscious Decision*" (A review of the use of general anaesthesia and conscious sedation in primary dental care, Department of Health, July 2000) under the joint chairmanship of the Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson and the Chief Dental Officer Mr Robin Wild, recommended that when a general anaesthetic is considered necessary for dental treatment, it should be carried out in a hospital setting where there is the immediate availability of a critical care facility.

In Northern Ireland, as a result of "*A Conscious Decision*", all general anaesthetics in general dental practice effectively ended on 31 December 2001. As a consequence there has been a growing use of conscious sedation in primary dental care settings and it is essential that where it is carried out, it is provided to the highest possible standards. Presently, however there are no specific Northern

Ireland standards or guidance for provision of intravenous sedation in general dental practice.

RQIA's review examined current practice in Northern Ireland through a sample of ten of the 41 general dental practices using this technique. The review involved an initial self assessment followed by a validation visit including expert reviewers and lay membership. The Review team made eight recommendations to the DHSSPS, NIMDTA and HSC Board, and recommendations were also made to the individual practices under review. Due to the levels of concerns identified within this sample of practices, a further review of intravenous sedation use in general dental practice is to be undertaken by RQIA later this year.

Summary of recommendations

The Review team made eight recommendations. These are:

1. As a matter of urgency the DHSSPS should develop Northern Ireland standards/guidance for the provision of conscious sedation in dental practice or make it clear to practitioners that another guidance document is taken as the expected standard.
2. DHSSPS/NIMDTA should carry out a review focusing on the availability, appropriateness and standardisation of intravenous sedation training.
3. Boards (HSC Board) must ensure that all dentists who carry out treatment using intravenous sedation are practising in line with the NPSA safety bulletin "Reducing the risk of overdose with Midazolam injection in adults".
4. Boards (HSC Board) should ensure that all practices carrying out treatment using intravenous sedation have training in dealing with medical emergencies. Practices should also have access to an appropriate range of emergency equipment including AEDs (Automatic External Defibrillators)
5. Boards (HSC Board) should develop a specific inspection protocol for dental practices that treat patients using intravenous sedation and carry out a separate, specific inspection of these practices.
6. DHSSPS should implement a process for the regulation of private dentistry.
7. Consideration should be given to the formation of a "sedation peer group" perhaps through the peer review and clinical audit system.
8. Although not recognised as a speciality by the GDC, DHSSPS should consider under new contractual arrangements only awarding contracts for the provision of intravenous sedation to those practices that can demonstrate that they meet appropriate standards.

Review Team membership

- Mr Barry Corkey BDS MSc MMedSc, Associate Specialist and Assistant Clinical Director, NHS Fife and Edinburgh Postgraduate Dental Institute
- Miss Elizabeth Duffin OBE, Lay Reviewer
- Mr Hall Graham BDS FDSRCPS MSc, RQIA Head of Primary Care Review
- Mr Sean Brown, RQIA Project Manager RQIA