

# SA DENTISTS SAY MEDICAL SCHEMES DO NOT PROVIDE ADEQUATELY FOR ORAL HEALTH

Media Release:

*14 June 2012:* The majority of South African dentists do not believe that local medical schemes provide adequately for oral health, according to the results of a new survey conducted by PPS.

The survey of more than 152 South African dentists revealed that only 7% of respondents believe local medical schemes provide sufficient cover for oral health treatments and procedures.

While the dentists surveyed revealed a 70% confidence level in the future of their profession - 10 percentage points lower than the average score of 80% recorded by the other professionals surveyed\* - most concerning was that only 32% of respondents said that they would encourage their children to enter their profession, the lowest score recorded for this question among all the other professions surveyed.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, it is very concerning that dentists feel that medical schemes do not provide sufficiently for dental treatment. "Good oral health is important for the overall wellness of the population and if schemes do not fund this adequately the result may be that many people are hindered from actually visiting the dentist due to financial strains."

Maretha Smit, Chief Executive Officer at the South African Dental Association (SADA), says there is increasing evidence of the importance of oral health as part of general health. "Poor oral health could, for instance, impact on aspects such as cardiovascular disease and fertility. By the same token, regular dental examinations could also play an important diagnostic role in respect of HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and oral cancer."

"The extremely low levels of confidence among dentists in whether they would encourage their children to enter into the dental profession - which may be related to concern over the extent of coverage provided by medical schemes - must be addressed immediately to ensure South African can grow and retain these necessary medical health professionals," says Joubert.

Local dentists are also concerned that the approach of the withdrawal of the National Health Reference Price List (NHRPL) - the basis upon which medical scheme rates were previously based but was withdrawn in 2010 resulting in medical schemes now setting their own rates by adjusting previous tariff lists for inflation - is not beneficial to the dental and oral health professions with a confidence level of 55% being scored.

Smit says the withdrawal of the NHRPL has had far reaching implications for the dental profession, as this has given medical schemes the opportunity to determine their own benefits for dental procedures, which are completely

unrelated to the actual cost of providing such procedures, and in most instances completely unsustainable for practices. “Unfortunately the majority of schemes continue to market themselves to members on the basis of ‘no co-payments’, which create unrealistic expectations with patients and often resulting in dentists being accused of “overcharging”.

When asked about the future of the healthcare system, dentists’ confidence levels also scored poorly at just 43%. This was also reflected in the low confidence levels regarding the implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI), with the survey indicating that only 51% of dentists agree with the principle behind NHI and only 17% believe NHI will solve the country’s ailing healthcare system. Furthermore, only 52% of dentists believe they will earn a sufficient income should NHI be implemented.

While it is clear that the healthcare industry as a whole is concerning for dentists, they scored a high confidence level of 78% that they would remain in South Africa for the foreseeable future. However, when asked whether they feel crime and unemployment would improve in the next five years dentists scored the lowest confidence level of just 39% among all professionals surveyed for both these areas.

Another area of concern for dentists remains whether the standard of education in South Africa will improve over the next five years, which scored a confidence level of only 49%. This is most likely a result of 93% of respondents indicating alarm over the lack of mathematics and science graduates in South Africa and 92% showing concern about the rising cost of education.

“While the survey among dentists revealed some concerns for their profession and the healthcare industry as a whole, on the positive side they do appear confident about remaining in South Africa. However, the concerns of the dental profession must be addressed in order to ensure the sustainability of the profession as a whole, as it already faces a severe skills shortage,” concludes Joubert.

#### **Other results from the dental professional results:**

- Confidence in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation was 58%
- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months was 59%
- Confidence in the outlook for local equity / share markets was 61%
- Confidence that South Africa has seen the worst of the global economic turmoil was 51%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire was 56%
- 9% believe the tax incentives offered by government are enough to encourage South Africans to save
- 70% believe that compulsory preservation is necessary to enforce South Africans to save

\* Advocates, Attorneys, Chartered Accountants, Dentists, Engineers, Medical, Pharmacy and other professions.

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#### **Additional information:**

PPS boasts in excess of 200,000 members who enjoy access to a comprehensive suite of financial and healthcare products that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of graduate professionals.

PPS is the largest South African company of its kind that still embraces an ethos of mutuality, which means that it exists solely for the benefit of its members. Thus, members who are policyholders can exclusively share in the profits of PPS Insurance and those who have PPS Investments products can also share in the profits of PPS Investments.

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