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SURVEY SHOWS SA DENTISTS INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT FUTURE OF PROFESSION IN THE COUNTRY

04 April 2013: South African dentists are becoming increasingly concerned about the future of their profession in the country and their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation.

Those are some of the key findings of the latest quarterly survey conducted by PPS of more than 150 South African dentists.

The fourth quarter 2012 survey revealed that respondents' confidence in the future of the profession in the country dropped by five percentage points to 59% from 64% in the previous quarter. Confidence levels on this issue have declined by a staggering 11% from the first three months of the year.

In addition, confidence levels amongst dentists in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation have declined by seven percentage points since the first quarter of 2012, from 58% to 51%.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, it is concerning that confidence levels among respondents regarding the future of the dental profession in the country have decreased. "This drop is most likely related to changes currently taking place within the medical industry, such as the proposed introduction of low guideline tariffs by the Health Professions Council of South Africa."

Some medical professionals are concerned that the low guideline tariffs will bring fees down to an unrealistic and unsustainable level, with the main purpose behind the decrease being to make fees more affordable for the government's planned NHI scheme, says Joubert.

According to the survey, 61% of respondents say they do not agree with the principle behind NHI, up six percentage points on the previous quarter, with 84% of respondents saying that NHI is not the solution to fixing the country's ailing healthcare system.

Confidence in their prospects of earning a sufficient income should NHI be implemented was also down one percentage point to 46%.

Maretha Smit, Chief Executive Officer at the South African Dental Association (SADA), stated that the dental profession is concerned about the absence of oral health services in most tiers of the NHI Green Paper and efforts have been made through consultation with stakeholders to rectify this situation. "As a result there were 10 NHI pilot districts where oral health services are presently being supplied and we hope that oral health,

seen as part of general health, is included in the much anticipated White Paper. SADA is concerned that HPCSA determining guideline tariffs is a precursor to rates payable under NHI which are unsustainable”

Joubert notes that a number of other statistics in the survey revealed urgent concerns about industry specific issues. “The survey showed that only seven percent of respondents feel that medical schemes provide adequately for oral health, which is down three percentage points from the previous quarter. SADA statistics back this up by revealing that payouts from medical schemes to dentistry had reduced from 8.4% in the late 1990s to 2.2% in 2011.”

Also concerning was the seven percent decrease (from 78% to 71%) in confidence levels amongst South African dentists during the year when asked whether they will remain in South Africa for the foreseeable future.

“It is highly worrisome that the results of these areas of questioning related to the sustainability of the future of the local dental industry have declined. The survey results highlight the importance of addressing the key concerns of the respondents that have been brought to the fore in order to attract and retain essential dental professionals in the country,” says Joubert.

While confidence levels on most of the surveyed elements decreased during the quarter, there were some bright spots. Dentists appear more optimistic about the outlook for the local equity / share markets over the next twelve months with confidence increasing by four percentage points to 62% compared with the previous quarter. Confidence levels over whether South Africa has seen the worst of the global economic turmoil also increased marginally from the previous quarter, while confidence in unemployment improving over the next five years was up two percentage points to 37%.

Other results from the dental professional survey:

- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months was down 1 percentage point to 50%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire was up two percentage points to 56%
- Confidence in the standard of education was down 4 percentage points to 41%
- Confidence in the crime rate improving over the next five years was down 1 percentage point to 36%
- Confidence in the future of the healthcare profession was up 1 percentage point to 40%