



General
Dental
Council

protecting patients,
regulating the dental team

THE ANNUAL PATIENT AND PUBLIC SURVEY

Guy Rubin, Research Manager

2 August 2011



Introduction

ComRes was commissioned to conduct the Annual Patient and Public Survey aimed at gaining patient and public understanding of the dental profession generally and the GDC specifically. The following objectives were addressed:

- To capture **public** and **patient** awareness and perceptions of the GDC.
- To provide the GDC with a snapshot of how **patients** and the **public** at large view particular policy initiatives that are being developed by the GDC.
- To test **public** views and levels of understanding of core issues that are currently prevalent within the dentistry profession, including regulation.
- To benchmark the GDC's reputation against comparator organisations.

A full analytical report of the survey is available from the GDC research manager



Methodology

- Face to face survey of 1531 adults across the UK
- Weighted to be representative of all adults. The margin of error is +/- 2.5 at a 95% confidence level.
- This has then been segmented to allow comparisons between patients and non-patients
- Additional booster sample conducted in NI to ensure robust sample size of 100 people to enable comparison with other regions.
- Completed between 8th and 17th April 2011
- *Cross tabs:* gender, age, social class, marital status, working status, children, internet access, region, urban/rural



Methodology

- Face to face survey of 1531 adults across the UK
- Weighted to be representative of all adults. The margin of error is +/- 2.5 at a 95% confidence level.
- This has then been segmented to allow comparisons between patients and non-patients
- Additional booster sample conducted in NI to ensure robust sample size of 100 people to enable comparison with other regions.
- Completed between 8th and 17th April 2011
- *Cross tabs:* gender, age, social class, marital status, working status, children, internet access, region, urban/rural



Overview of results(1)

Public and patient use of dentists

- In the last twelve months, 65% of the UK population have visited a dentist, whilst 10% used to go but don't anymore or have never been to the dentist.
- *Social group trend:* 74% of social group AB have visited dentist in the last 12 months, compared to 56% of social group DE.
- 61% receive NHS dental treatment, compared to 27% who receive private treatment and 9% who receive both.
- Overwhelming majority of patients are confident in (94%) and satisfied with (95%) the dental treatment that they have received.
- Encouraging level of trust and satisfaction among people towards their own dentists.

Attitudes and awareness of dental regulation

- 69% of the population believe that dentists and dental care professionals are regulated.
- However, 70% say that they have not heard of the GDC.
- The roles and functions of the GDC are all considered to be very important by the public.
- 73% of people say regulation of dentists is 'very important' (10 out of 10)
- More than two in five (44%) did not check whether or not the dental professional was qualified to treat them



Overview of results(2)

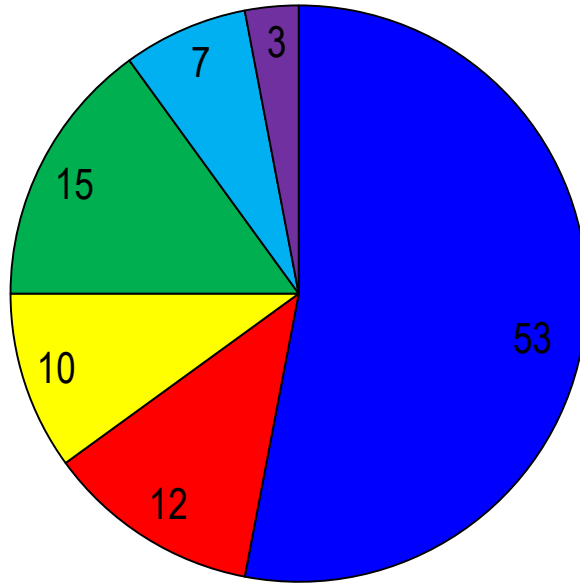
GDC Awareness

- People are most likely to associate the BDA with responsibility for regulating dentistry (44%)
- GDC were the organisation most likely to be approached by a member of the public with a concern or complaint.

GDC Communication

- The most effective way for the GDC to communicate is through providing information in dental surgeries, or through dental professionals themselves

Public and patient use of dentists



- In the last 6 months
- In the last 7-12 months
- In the last 1-2 years
- More than two years ago
- I used to go to the dentist but I don't anymore
- I have never been to the dentist

Base: All UK Adults (1563)

Two thirds of the population (65%) have been dental patients in the last 12 months.

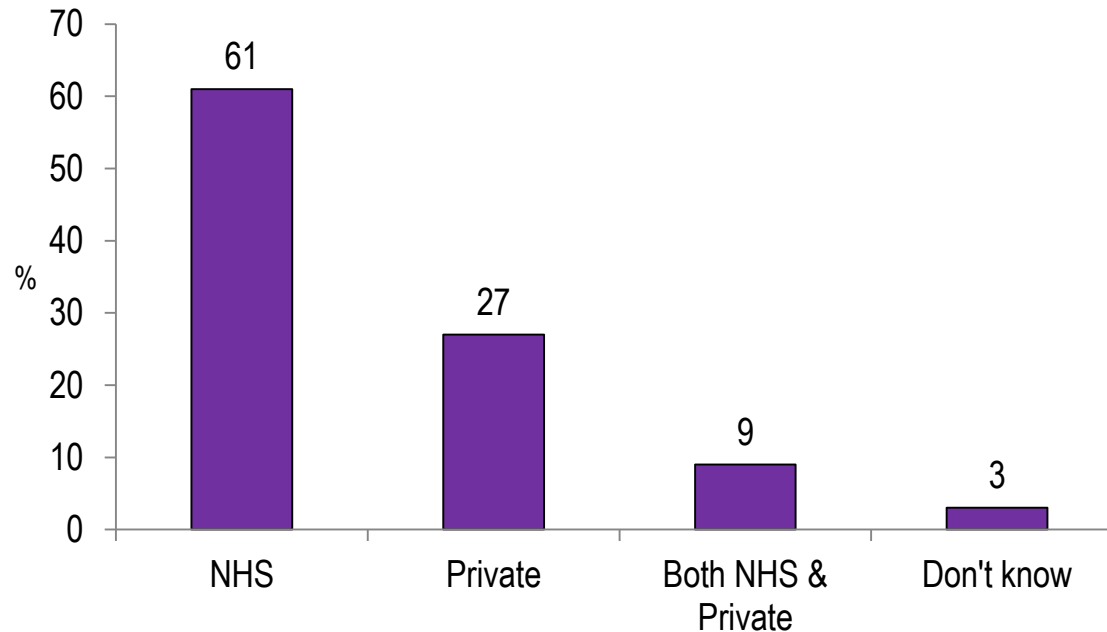
10% either used to go but don't anymore or have never been to a dentist

Dental patients in the last 12 months by social class:

AB	C1	C2	DE
74%	69%	65%	56%



Public and patient use of dentists

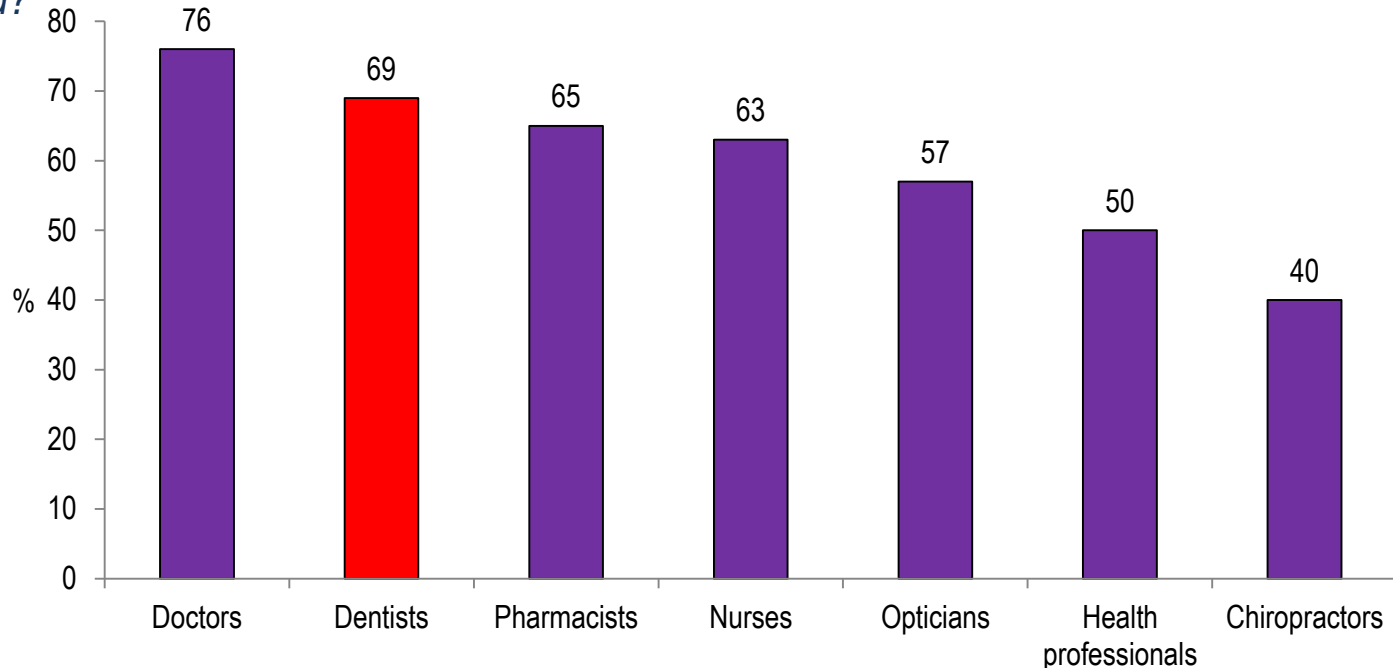


Base: All patients (1025)

Trend by social group: People in the higher-earning income groups are more likely to receive private treatment than those who are in the lower-earning income groups, yet the majority of all people receive NHS dental treatment.

Importance of dental regulation

All adults were asked: which of the following professions, if any, do you think are regulated?



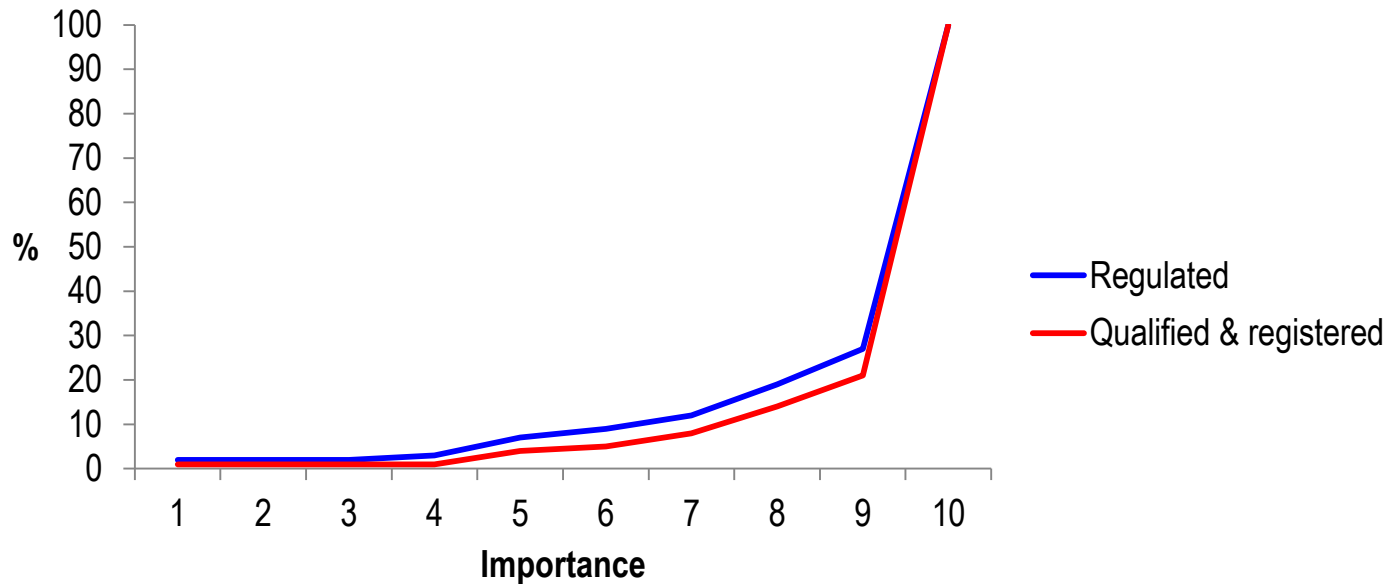
Base: All UK adults (1563)

- *More than two thirds of the UK population think that dentists are regulated.*
- *This is encouraging for the GDC, although as is evident later this awareness is perhaps not as developed as it could be.*



Importance of dental regulation

All adults were asked: how important or unimportant is it to you that (i) Dentists and Dental Care Professionals are regulated (ii) Dentists and Dental Care Professionals are qualified and registered with a central body in order to provide dental care?



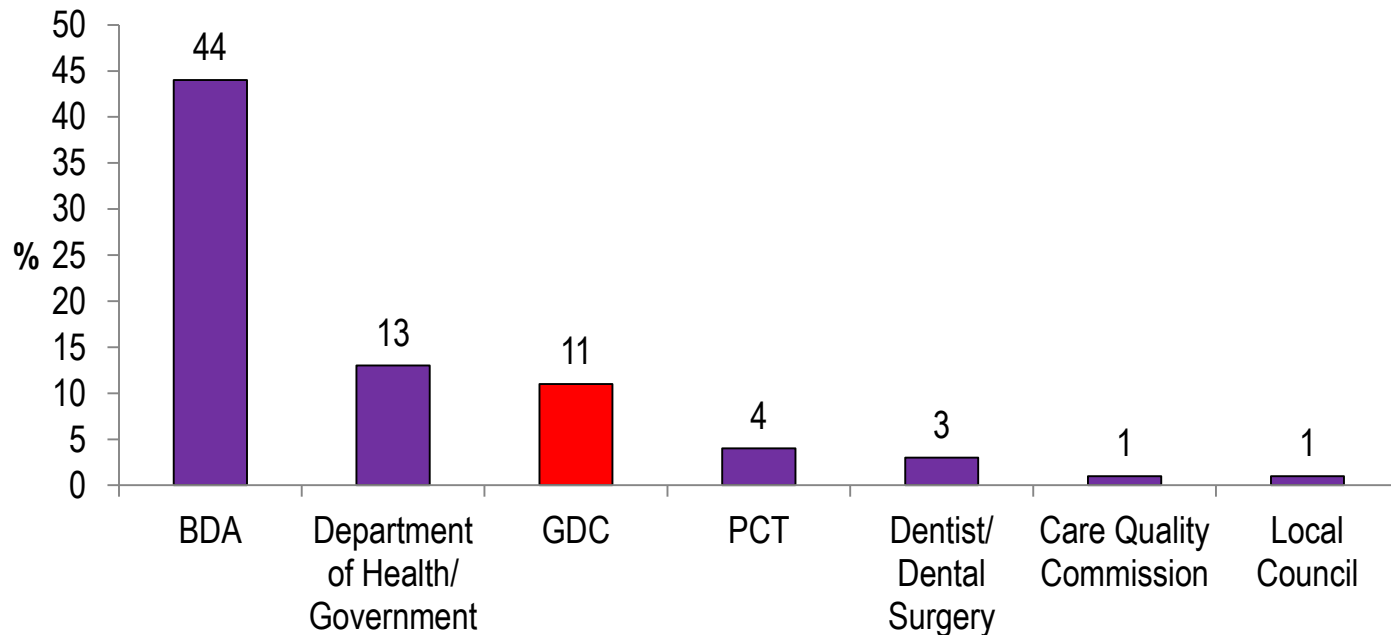
Base: All UK adults (1563)

A significant majority of people say that regulation and being qualified and registered with a central body is 'very important' giving a score of 10 out of 10.



Awareness of dental regulation

- Without any prompting, only 3% of all people cite the GDC as the organisation that regulates dentistry, compared to 7% who think BDA is responsible
- People who are not aware of the GDC were then asked from a prompted list, with the combined answers below:

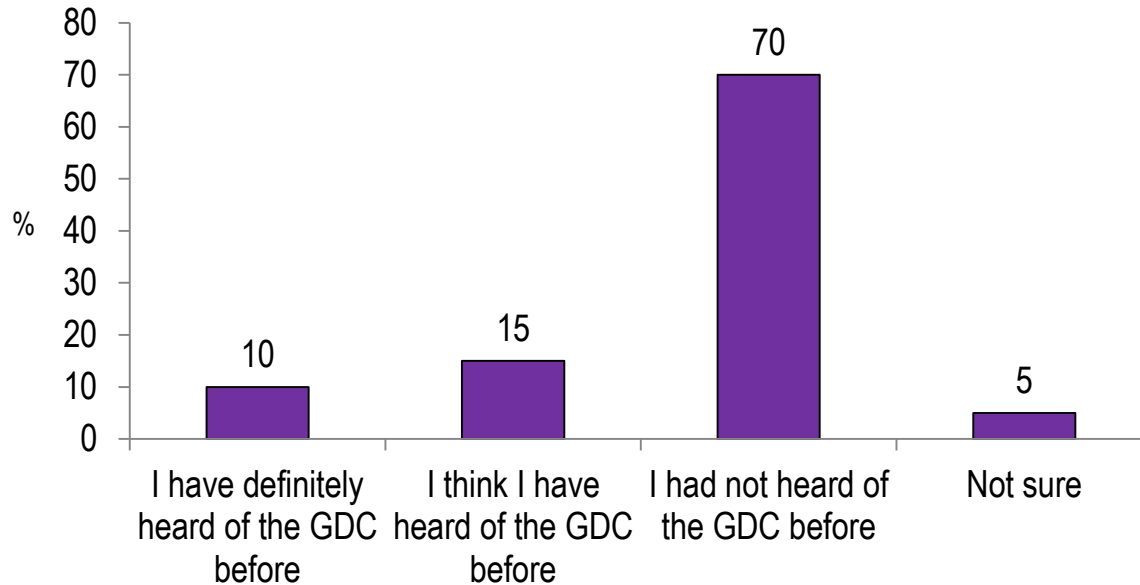


Base: All UK adults (1563)



Awareness of the GDC

All adults were asked: which of the following best describes how aware you were of the General Dental Council before this survey?



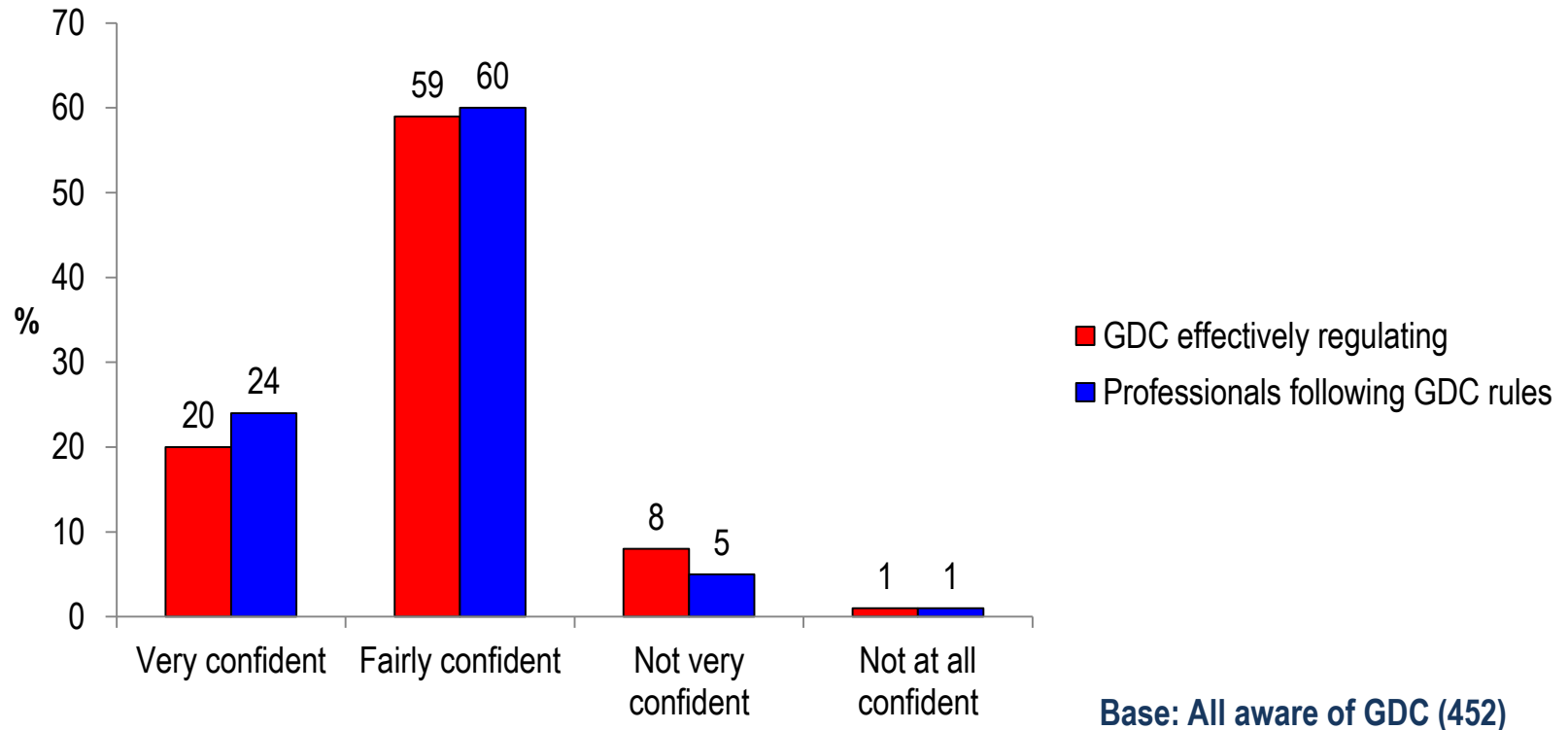
Base: All UK adults (1563)

- 37% of people aged 55 to 64 are aware, compared to 17% of people aged 18-24
- People in England and Scotland (27% and 24%) are more likely to have heard of the GDC than people in NI and Wales (22% and 19%)



Effectiveness of GDC

People who were aware of the GDC were then asked: Overall how confident or otherwise are you that (i) the GDC is regulating dentists/dental care professionals effectively; (ii) dentists/dental care professionals follow the GDC rules?





Importance of GDC functions

All Adults were asked: how important or unimportant you think each of these functions are? (Scale 1-10, where 10=very important)

Investigating allegations of misconduct
Maintaining and regulating standards of professionals skills
Keeping an up-to-date register of dental professionals
Assuring standards of professional training
Enabling patients to report misconduct
Setting standards of performance
Maintaining and regulating standards of behaviour / conduct
Requiring dentist to demonstrate that their skills and knowledge are kept up to date
Setting rules of conduct / behaviour
Possessing the power to discipline or 'strike off' dental professionals who breach standards
Dealing with patient complaints

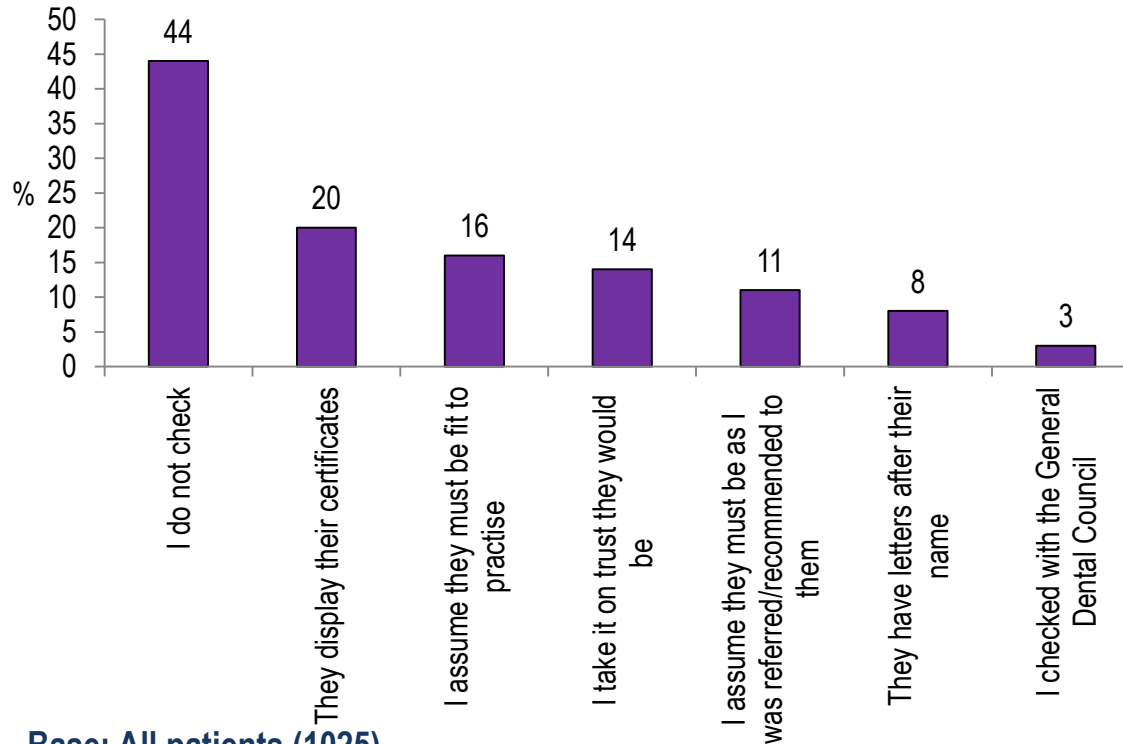
Base: All UK adults (1563)

- Each function received a mean score of at least 9.28 – indicating that they were all considered to be very important



Checking Qualifications

Those who had attended a dentist in the last 12 months were then asked: How, if at all, do you check whether or not the dental professionals you used were qualified to treat you?



Base: All patients (1025)

- *44% of patients surveyed do not check whether their dentist is qualified*
- *This would seem to emphasise the trust that patients have in their dentists*



Complaints procedure

- The majority of people (70%) are very or fairly confident that if they need to make a complaint it would be resolved fairly
- 75% of patients, compared to 62% of the wider public, were very or fairly confident in the resolution of complaints
- When presented with a list of organisations, people were most likely to say that the GDC was the place they would go if they had a complaint about the skills or behaviour of a dental professional (24%)
- 14% of all people said that they would be most likely to approach the Dental Complaints Service



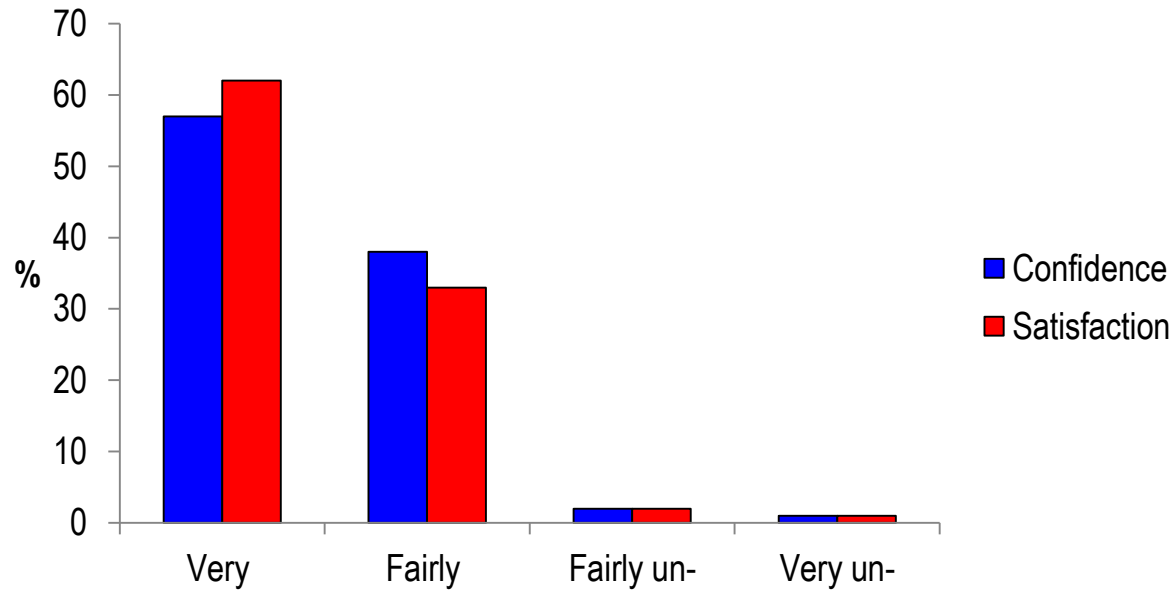
Displaying GDC registration

- 60% of patients said that they were 'more likely' to trust their dentist if they displayed GDC registration in surgery – compared to 3% who said they would be 'less likely'
- 50% of these patients wanted this displayed 'in the waiting room/reception' and 46% said 'a certificate or sticker in the practice'
- Only 13% wanted 'a quality mark or logo like the Gas Safe mark'



Patient treatment

Those who had attended a dentist in the last 12 months were then asked: (i) how confident or otherwise are you that your dentist/ dental care professional treats YOU fairly; (ii) how satisfied or otherwise are you with your dental care or treatment?



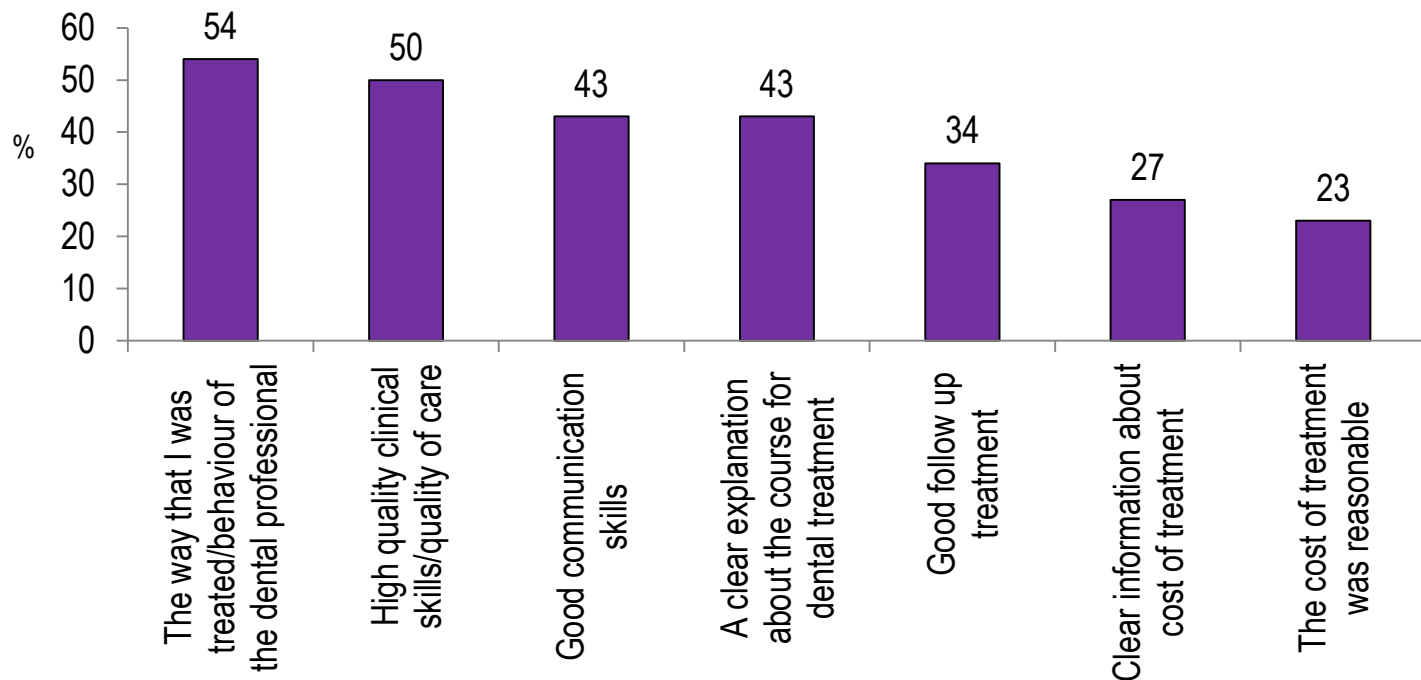
Base: All patients (1025)

Patients in London area least likely to be 'very satisfied' with their treatment (42%), compared to 80% of patients in the West Midlands and in Yorkshire & Humber



Reasons for confidence

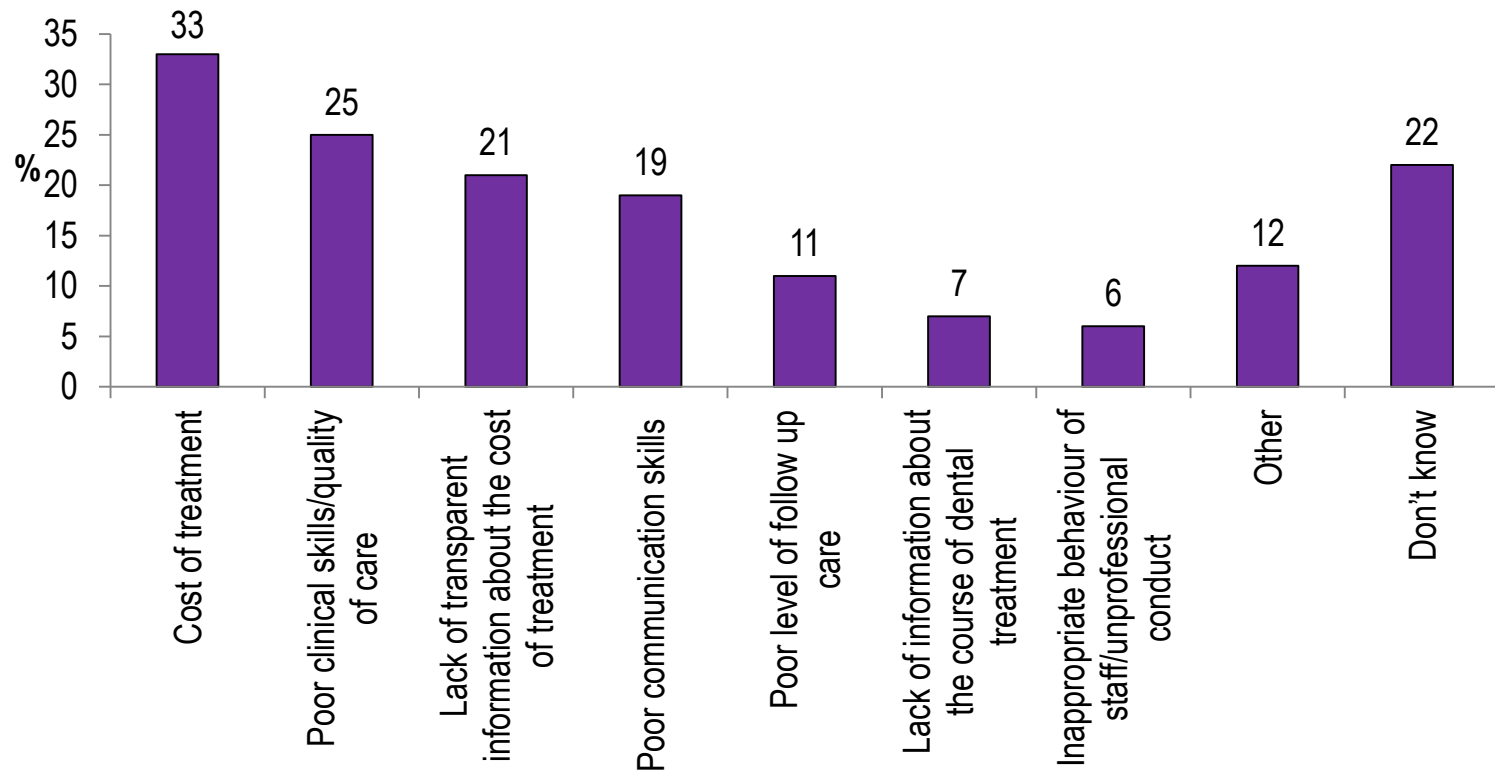
Those who are confident were asked: which of the following reasons, if any, best describe why you are confident in your experience of your dentist or dental care professional



Base: All patients who are confident (968)

Reasons for lack of confidence

Those who are not confident were asked: which of the following reasons, if any, best describe why you are not confident in your experience of your dentist or dental care professional?



Base: All patients who are not confident (29) (NOTE: This is too small to draw robust conclusions)

Despite cost of treatment being the least cited reason for confidence, it was the most cited reason for a lack of confidence amongst patients



Conclusions(1)

- There is strong public support for regulating dentistry in the UK – people agree that the GDC roles and responsibilities are already very important
- However, the public doesn't know who regulates dentistry and awareness of GDC is low. Just 11% identify GDC as a regulator, while 44% identify the BDA.
- Those that are aware, believe that the GDC regulates effectively and are confident that dentists/dental care professionals follow the rules.
- There is strong patient and public confidence in UK dentistry complaints procedures, but only 13% think they have heard of the DCS
- Though most people agree that there is a publicly available GDC register, only a small minority check the register before getting dental treatment.



Conclusion(2)

- The findings on GDC awareness and communication methods provide useful evidence for the GDC communications strategy.
- Patients are more likely to trust their dentist/dentists/dental care professionals if information about GDC registration is displayed in surgeries.
- Good communication with patients, as well as information on treatments and cost, are important in driving confidence/lack of confidence in dentists/dental care professionals.