



Assembly of the German Dental Association calls for more support for the outpatient sector

“We need more security!”

The Assembly of the German Dental Association (Bundeszahnärztekammer, BZÄK) congregated in Munich on 4 and 5 November 2022. In his welcoming address, Klaus Holetschek, the Bavarian Minister of State for Health and Care, thanked the dental profession for its continuing commitment, not least during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also referred to the ongoing crises, including the energy crisis and high inflation, which also drove the costs of dental practices.

For the first time, Prof. Ihsane Ben Yahya (Morocco), President of the FDI World Dental Federation, addressed the delegates.

She emphasized in her welcoming address that while all countries were facing individual situations and challenges, by working together, knowledge and best practices could be shared and positive changes could be driven to provide the best possible oral health for all. FDI, she said, was proud of having Germany as a member country and welcomed the efforts of BZÄK in promoting oral health and advancing dentistry.

Dr Klaus Sürmann, head of the German Dentists' Relief Foundation (HDZ), thanked the attendees for the willingness to donate in support of the Ukraine aid and the victims of last year's floods, referring HDZ' numerous aid projects.



BZÄK President Prof. Christoph Benz accepted the tribute from former BZÄK Vice President Prof. Dietmar Oesterreich (left) and retired fleet doctor Dr Helfried Bieber (right).

Tribute to Oesterreich and Bieber

Prof. Christoph Benz, BZÄK President, presented Prof. Dietmar Oesterreich with the highest award of the German dental

profession, the Fritz Linnert Medal of Honour, for his decades of service to the profession. Dr Helfried Bieber, chief dentist of the German Armed Forces, was awarded the Gold Badge of Honour of the German Dental Association.

Presidents' reports

In his political report, Benz spoke about crises as an opportunity. At the beginning of the pandemic, dentistry had felt to be the “fifth wheel”, but it had capitalised on its hygiene expertise and delivered exemplary work. It is true, he said, that society in general and the dental profession in particular are facing new challenges, such as high inflation rates and the energy crisis, which are bound to have an impact on dental practices. It makes sense to protect the inpatient sector from overload, but the outpatient sector has been completely forgotten, even though it plays a central role in the care of the population. Investor chains and health care kiosks apparently enjoy a higher priority with politicians than the justified concerns and needs of physicians in private practice. The federal government has repeatedly admitted that the success of the German healthcare system is to a large extent based on the dense network of small practices throughout the country.

Benz also spoke about the breach of trust as manifested in the so-called Financial Stabilisation Act for Statutory Health Insurance. The version that has now been passed puts the long-term treatment of periodontitis and, thus, patient welfare at risk. Other topics included staff shortages and adequate pay for medical staff.

Konstantin von Laffert, BZÄK Vice President, called for a speedy reduction of red tape. There is no “special relief packages” for practices such as those that exist for hospitals—but at least we should not have “special burden packages” for practices. He said that BZÄK had many realistic proposals that could mean more time for care. However, politicians are simply not prepared to act. The EU Medical Device Regulation (MDR) poses particular problems for all private practices. As there are too few Notified Bodies, the required recertification of medical products is not making enough progress. This also affects many dental products. There is a risk of supply bottlenecks if specific products and devices are no longer allowed to be used in dental practices. Von



The Presidents of the Federal Dental Association gave their first statement of accounts (from left to right): Dr Romy Ermler, Konstantin von Laffert and Prof. Christoph Benz.

Laffert also touched on the European Health Data Space (EHDS), efforts to achieve sustainability in practice, the shortage of specialists, the risks inherent in externally funded medical care centres (MCCs)—including the risk of impending overtreatment—as well as the risks of “aligner stores” with remote treatment and mistreatment through self-treatment.

Dr Romy Ermler, BZÄK Vice President, pointed out that dentistry is an energetic profession. Dragging out the revised German standard schedule of fees for private patients (GOZ) can no longer be justified. The remuneration of dentists had been deliberately removed from the free market. But then the state must also ensure that fees are and can be expected to remain up to date. However, the state has successfully shunned its responsibility—since 1988 and throughout the tenures of 12 health ministers.

The Financial Stabilisation Act for Statutory Health Insurance also capped benefits supporting the systematic treatment of periodontitis—the current Minister of Health has clearly abandoned any thought of a future-oriented and reliable prevention policy. With a view to the next generation of professionals, Ermler said, policy-

makers must continue to be admonished to round up the necessary support to alleviate the discrepancies between urban and rural health care. It would also be important to hasten along the digital transformation in terms of improving processes, creating a functioning IT infrastructure, etc.

Motion and resolution

In their leading political motion, delegates called on the federal government to improve the legal and economic framework for dental practices. To this end, the fees reimbursed by private and statutory health insurers must be permanently adjusted to reflect cost increases. Budgeting of any kind is rejected. Independent dental practices must be strengthened.

Other resolutions were passed, for example, on adjusting fee point values, on orthodontics exercised by general dentists, on the shortage of skilled personnel and the promotion of young talent, against the commercialisation of dentistry, on improving dental care for people with disabilities or special medical needs, for ending the budgeting of periodontal treatment, and for an IT infrastructure that actually benefits users.

By the way

There was no sign of life from the Federal Minister of Health, Prof. Karl Lauterbach, at this Assembly of the German Dental Association in Munich—no welcoming

message, no delegation of a State Secretary to Munich. Interestingly enough, Lauterbach had been invited by the private “Hartmannbund” medical association and accepted... BZÄK President Prof. Christoph Benz, commenting on this af-

front to the highest body of German dentists at the press conference, said, “Lauterbach has a strange aversion to outpatient practices.”

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