

Our Reference: FOI/2011/11/211
Your Ref:

Legal Services

Mr Clarke
What do They Know

Director
Mrs C M E Pike LLB
Solicitor

(By Email)

7 November 2011

Dear Mr Clarke

Re: request for information under The Freedom of Information Act.

Further to your request for information dated 26 October 2011 please find attached the University of Birmingham's response.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request has been dealt with, you may ask for an internal review. A copy of the Complaints and Appeals procedure is attached. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have a right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision.

Please note our statement in respect of Copyright, which is also attached.

If you have any queries with regard to this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Team
University of Birmingham

Encs

Your request for information read:

“I have been informed by an NHS Chief Executive that dentists have the capability to diagnose chronic systemic mercury poisoning whereas GPs do not (and thus the GP was correct in telling me to instead see a dentist about my fatigue and mental and other problems).

In that connection, could you please tell me the following:

- 1) What training in this diagnosis do your dental students receive?*
- 2) What methods do they use in this diagnosis?*
- 3) Why have all the dentists I have consulted invariably insisted that they do not have any capability of making such diagnosis and insist that I have to seek it from a doctor instead?”*

The University of Birmingham responds:

The University of Birmingham is required to respond to a request made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, if it holds the information being requested and one of the limited exemptions does not apply.

Teaching related to the use of mercury-based amalgam filling materials is delivered in the following pre-clinical modules.

- (i) Practical Dental Skills delivered to the year two dentistry students.**
- (ii) Dental Materials delivered to the year three dentistry students.**

Chemistry and material properties of mercury amalgam materials are taught. Issues regarding the continued use of mercury-based amalgam materials are also covered using a clinical evidence-based approach. Issues regarding the manufacture and disposal of mercury-based materials are also covered.

In addition a semi-structured symposium is delivered in the final year of the course as part of the General Dental Practice lecture programme during which the advantages and limitations of alternative materials to metallic restorations are discussed.

In response to your specific questions, please see below:

"I have been informed by an NHS Chief Executive that dentists have the capability to diagnose chronic systemic mercury poisoning whereas GPs do not (and thus the GP was correct in telling me to instead see a dentist about my fatigue and mental and other problems).

In that connection, could you please tell me the following:

- 1) *What training in this diagnosis do your dental students receive?*

Undergraduate dental students at the University of Birmingham are not taught to diagnose chronic systemic mercury poisoning.

- 2) *What methods do they use in this diagnosis?*

Undergraduate dental students at the University of Birmingham are not taught to diagnose chronic systemic mercury poisoning and therefore the question is not relevant.

- 3) *Why have all the dentists I have consulted invariably insisted that they do not have any capability of making such diagnosis and insist that I have to seek it from a doctor instead?*

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 the University of Birmingham is only required to provide information that it holds rather than to express an opinion; therefore the University can provide only limited information in respect of this part of your request

The diagnosis of systemic poisoning clearly falls into the area of clinical toxicology and therefore would require a diagnosis from a medically qualified specialist. A general dental practitioner would not have the knowledge or skills to exclude all other systemic possible causes of the symptoms an individual was suffering without considerable postgraduate training. Therefore only a limited number of dentists would have this capability.

University of Birmingham

Freedom of Information

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

Complaints and Appeals against a Refusal Notice issued in response to a request for information must be made in writing to the University's Information Compliance Manager (address given below). Complaints in respect of the University's Publication Scheme can be made in the same way.

Complaints and Appeals will be acknowledged within five (5) working days of receipt. The Information Compliance Manager will then refer the matter to the University's Director of Legal Services or nominee for consideration. If the Director of Legal Services was involved in responding to the request at the first stage, then the University's Registrar & Secretary or nominee will be asked to investigate the matter.

The Director of Legal Services or the Registrar & Secretary as appropriate may, after having sought further information from the members of staff involved in dealing with the original request, seek to resolve the issue on the basis of the documentation submitted. Where the Director of Legal Services or the Registrar & Secretary requires further clarification, he/she may decide to meet with the members of staff involved in dealing with the original request.

A full response to the complaint will normally be sent direct to the Complainant(s) within fifteen (15) working days, or in the case of a complex review, especially when the public interest test is involved, within thirty (30) working days.

If, having received this response, the Complainant(s) remains dissatisfied, s/he may make an appeal to the Information Commissioner at the address below.

Addresses for Correspondence

Information Compliance Manager
Legal Services
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT

Or: foi@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK95AF

The University of Birmingham

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