

# Optimising skill mix in dentistry:

## dental therapists, direct access and the future



### RATIONALE

Urgent action is required to address problems arising from an aging population retaining their teeth, high levels of avoidable tooth decay in children and poor access to NHS dental services in parts of Wales.

Our study will inform the new NHS dental service contract and is the logical start to a programme of research on the effects (including cost- benefits) of contract changes.



### AIMS

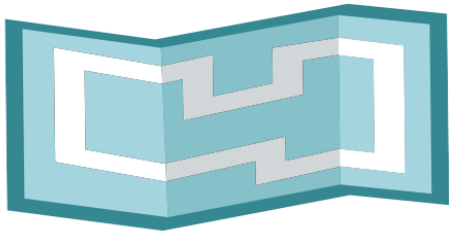
Our aim is to better understand how to make the best use of the dental team. We will find out what works, why and in what circumstance. We will develop practical training courses and a self-evaluation toolkit to help dental practices work out how ready they are for skill-mix changes and set action plans.

### OBJECTIVES



1. Develop an ‘official’ theory (logic model) to describe the conditions or context (C) under which the mechanisms (M) operate to produce desired outcomes (O).
2. Undertake a set of case studies of dental practices with and without a dental therapist, collecting patient treatment and patient views data and interviewing the dental team.
3. Present a ‘real’ theory which describes the features required for optimisation of skill-mix service delivery in the GDS.
4. Develop a skills-optimisation self-evaluation tool (SOSET) for practices to assess their readiness for skill-mix optimisation and provide guidance on best practice.
5. Develop and pilot test training for dental therapists to support the full use of their skills.
6. Develop and pilot test training for general dental practitioners in the optimisation of skill-mix.
7. Disseminate SOSET, training and recommendations.

### PLAN OF INVESTIGATION



This study is in two parts:

- Part One is a 3-step realist evaluation using mixed methods.
  - Step-1: we develop an ‘official’ programme theory (using policy documents and the wider literature) to describe and explain how skill optimisation is meant to enhance oral healthcare in Wales.
  - Step-2: we test this theory against what actually happens in practice by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from 6 case study dental practices, 3 with a DT and 3 without.
  - Step-3: we develop a ‘real’ programme theory to explain mechanisms and contexts by which skill optimisation can achieve its intended outcomes.
- Part Two concerns the development and evaluation of a skills-optimisation self-evaluation toolkit (SOSET) for practices to judge their readiness for skill-mix developments and two training courses. We will use a modified Kirkpatrick’s framework for the course evaluation.

The project is organised into six work-packages (WPs) (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Work packages and recruitment overview

