

DEMYSTIFYING DISCRETIONARY INDEMNITY

It is essential to get a suitable Dental Indemnity policy in place that's right for you. Knowing exactly what you're covered for, as well as what level of protection and support you will receive when you need it most, offers invaluable peace of mind.

Know the difference

There are two types of indemnity that you need to be aware of – discretionary and contractual. They differ significantly in what they provide and what standard of protection they offer, so it's crucial to ensure you know what type of policy you have or are considering.

Discretionary cover – a cautionary tale.

Discretionary cover provides no guarantee that your policy provider will protect you or pay out should a claim be made against you. All Mutual Defence Organisations (MDOs) offer discretionary cover, which means the choice to accept a claim and fight your corner is completely at their discretion when the time comes. There are no specifics stated in the policy, so it is up to them whether they cover your defence costs for GDC complaints and disciplinary hearings, as well as protect against worldwide Good Samaritan acts and damage to your reputation.

Contractual cover – guaranteed and regulated.

In contrast, contractual policies deliver guarantees that you will be covered for all terms stated within the policy. It is a legally-binding contract to provide the legal support and financial pay outs that result from any claims made relating to the specified terms. Insurance policy providers are also regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). They are required to treat all clients fairly, to disclose their full financial position when required and to hold adequate fund reserves to meet claims – no such regulations exist for discretionary policy providers. This also means that contractual insurance policy holders are eligible for compensation via the Financial Services Compensation Scheme should the insurer be unable to cover the cost of a claim. Plus, they can access the Financial Ombudsman Service should a dispute arise with their policy provider, which would once again not be possible if working with an MDO.

So why is discretionary cover available?

Those that offer discretionary indemnity suggest that this type of policy affords them the flexibility to avoid gaps or grey areas within their policies. However, potential issues can be avoided simply by working with a specialist insurance broker that understands the dental profession and remains abreast of the latest changes or challenges being faced. A provider that takes the time to get to know you and your specific situation is always going to be able to offer the most effective support and protection. This is how policies can be tailored to you, minimising possible grey areas while still providing you with contract certainty.

More than a pay out

Having appropriate Dental Indemnity in place is a requirement for all dental professionals in the UK. This ensures that any patient who suffers harm as the result of their dental experience can seek adequate compensation to rectify their situation. However, it is so much more than this for clinicians – it offers confidence that you have someone fighting your corner should a mistake or unjustified claim be made against you.

Dentistry is already an incredibly stressful profession. Those in human health and social work are among those with the highest levels of stress, depression or anxiety in the UK, with situations only further exacerbated by the pandemic. In dentistry, the landscape seems to be at its worst. In 2019, the BDA suggested that 68% of surveyed dentists were facing low morale, while just under 55% of practice owners and 35% of associates were finding their jobs very stressful. A small survey from February 2021 found anxiety-related symptoms to be present in over 70% of participating dentists. Although there are many potential causes of stress, NHS Digital has found that the risk of litigation was among the top reasons for low morale.

So, having protection you can trust is about much more than covering your finances should a claim be made. It's also integral to your peace of mind, giving you one less thing to stress about. Don't compromise on your indemnity – choose a provider you can rely on. Howden deliver contract certainty, with highly competitive premiums and fully customisable policies to suit professionals at any stage of their careers. We will also cover all regulatory and GDC-related issues and aim to make insurance simple by ensuring you work with a dedicated account handler that understands your specific situation. Howden is here for you in every possible way, providing valuable support from a team that is always at the end of a phone call or email.

Don't risk it

As a busy dental professional, you have plenty of things to worry about other than whether your professional indemnity will give you the protection you really need. Don't subject your career and your mental health to discretionary cover – be certain that you have the support you need should you ever face a claim.

Contact us

dentists@howdengroup.com
020 4579 2613

T +44 (0)20 7623 3806 F +44 (0)20 7623 3807 E info@howdengroup.com

www.howdengroup.co.uk

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