The Dental Council’s new guidance regarding infection prevention and control (IPC) and continuing professional development CPD deserve careful and critical examination by all dentists.

In our rush to judgment, we can often lose sight of the fact that this is guidance for the profession that is intended to reflect best practice and scientific progress. We can argue whether guidance ought to be evidence based or evidence informed, but at the very least dentists should be satisfied that regard has been had to known risk and to a lesser extent there has been some anticipation of possible risk.

This was very much the concern reflected in the searing and lengthy IDA critique of the initial November 2013 draft IPC code of practice circulated by the Dental Council. And while reservations remain, today we must acknowledge that the Dental Council has responded to many of our chief concerns. These include the provisions relating to decontamination units, the use of washer-disinfectors, autoclaves, and changes as regards infected staff receiving treatment. Setting out acceptable standards rather than unattainable doctrines will be shown to produce a better mitigation of risk in years to come, I have no doubt.

Highest standards

We make no apology for supporting regulation of the highest standards of dental care where such standards are appropriate, proportionate and where due account is taken of the cost of implementation as against the likely level of risk. It is also vital that the Dental Council takes seriously its responsibility to pursue those who seek to sell the profession and our patients short at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the profession who are committed to bearing the cost associated with regulation. That is why new legislation is required to give the Council powers to tackle the small number who tarnish the good name of dentistry in Ireland.

Support warranted

Equally, the State must be brought to task for affording no assistance to dentists who comply with standards set by the Dental Council. Why, for example, will the HSE arrange to collect clinical waste from a doctor in general practice but not the dentist treating medical card patients next door? We will be seeking financial support towards the cost of implementation from the State in forthcoming discussions.

CPD imperative

As an Association, we will assist members through the dissemination of best practice and the provision of appropriate education and training. The new guidance on CPD from the Dental Council should also be studied closely, given that all dentists are obliged to engage in CPD and this will be the subject of further new legislation shortly. The new core competencies are appropriate and, in fact, members who have been attending IDA programmes in recent years have been provided with support in most if not all these areas prior to their formal recognition by the Council. Again, we will be redoubling our efforts to assist dentists to meet their CPD requirements, taking account of the new guidance from the Dental Council.

Our Board and Council will be studying the new guidance from the Dental Council, and members should expect to receive further updates and news of more assistance being made available to IDA members in the coming months.