

NHS dental services: people's experiences

Purpose

1. This report informs the Board about what people are telling us about their experiences of accessing NHS dentistry. It further describes with local, regional and national policy positions and the action that our Healthwatch is taking.

Key issues

2. In 2019 our Healthwatch published a report examining the difficulties in Peterborough and Wisbech were having accessing NHS dental services¹. Improvements were made to the urgent dental contract as a result. However, in past year, with covid restrictions in place, we have heard about increasing and extensive problems people are having getting NHS dental treatment. The problems now extend across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
3. People's difficulties accessing NHS dental care is the most frequent reason why people contact us. Sections 7 and 8 show the volume and provides examples of what people tell us. Sections 9 - 11 describe the action we are taking.
4. We are a member of the regional group that is set up to share intelligence between Healthwatch, NHSE/I commissioners and the Local Dental Committee about NHS dental services. Jessica Bendon, the Senior Dental Contract Manager for the East of England, will attend the Board meeting and explain the regional strategy.
5. Healthwatch England is progressing concerns regarding NHS dentistry at a national level following their report published in January this year².
6. In March 2021 a letter was sent from the Department of Health and Social Care to all NHS dental providers with details of the NHS dental contract reform³. NHSE/I have been asked by DHSC to lead this reform and work closely with the British Dental Association on revising the dental contract.

¹ [Thousands denied dental care in Peterborough | Healthwatch Peterborough](#)

² [COVID-19 pandemic pushes NHS dentistry to crisis point, finds new report | Healthwatch](#)

³ [Letter to all dental providers from DHSC March 2021 \(england.nhs.uk\)](#)

Action required by the Board

7. The Board is asked to:
 - Note the report.

Authors

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12 May 2021

What people are telling us

8. In the first quarter of 2021, 195 people contacted us about NHS dental treatment. Of these, 11% were about urgent treatment, nearly 10% concerning children and 3% from patients with maternity exemption certificates. Under 2% were positive experiences of care. The majority of people who contacted us could not find an NHS dentist who would see them, although some said they had been offered private treatment by the same practices.
9. These are representative examples of what people are telling us:
 - ‘I have rung every dentist in Cambridge and all are only taking private patients or a 6-9 month waiting lists.’
 - ‘I have checked websites of all dentist practices in Peterborough mentioned on NHS website - none accept NHS patients.’
 - ‘I have been told they were "not allowed" to offer any NHS treatment.’
 - ‘My child is having dental problems. Baby teeth are not coming out and new ones are squashing together causing pain.’
 - ‘This means having to wait until a solvable dental issue becomes a problem where the tooth might not be able to be saved.’
 - ‘I’m really struggling to find a dentist that accepts NHS, I’m currently pregnant and my teeth are crumbling away.’

What we are doing

10. Our key response is to give people information; telling people to contact NHS 111 if they are in severe pain or have facial swelling. Apart from directing people to lists on the NHS website or Dental Choices, we are also suggesting people contact NHS England and NHS Improvement to give feedback. Another suggestion is for people to raise the problem with their MP.
11. We share our feedback at fortnightly meetings with the chair of the Local Dental Committee and the regional Dental Team. The regional team has been helpful with some individual enquiries but they are having to prioritise who needs help the most.
12. Our evidence is collected by Healthwatch England via the CRM and so contributes to the national picture.