

Experiences report: Update on NHS dentistry

Purpose

1. This report updates the Board about people's experiences of finding an NHS dentist and describes actions being taken.

Background

2. Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough first highlighted people's struggles finding an NHS dentist in 2019¹, particularly in Peterborough and the north of Cambridgeshire. Since then, Covid restrictions have severely impacted upon dental care, with problems being reported in every area of the country.
3. For the past two years dental worries have been the single biggest concern that people have contacted us about and has been regularly reported to this Board² and Healthwatch England. Our Healthwatch collates this feedback and presents to NHS England who are responsible for organising NHS dental care.
4. In October 2021 Healthwatch England joined forces with the British Dental Association and wrote to the Chancellor demanding action³.

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

² [Update on dental services | Healthwatch Peterborough](#)

³ [Government action demanded on NHS dentistry | Healthwatch Peterborough](#)

Recent action

5. In January 2022 NHS England announced an extra £50 million for NHS dental services to fund additional evening and weekend appointments, if dentists wished to do so. Only 10% of dental practices in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough took up the offer. We have not been given details of the uptake.
6. Cambridgeshire Community Services, who provide our local emergency Dental Access Centres, have told us that they were not able to utilise the funding as they could not secure any additional staffing within the given timescale. We are led to understand that the tender window was open for a few working days.
7. As well as passing on intelligence to Healthwatch England, we attend the monthly liaison meetings between NHS England, the Local Dental Committee and other Healthwatch in the region. It is clear however, that the situation needs resolution at a national level, we are supporting Healthwatch England in lobbying for action.

Current position

8. We continue to advise people about how to find an NHS dentist. People are having to travel increasing distances for urgent care and most people cannot access routine dental care. In January and February, we dealt with 89 enquiries.
9. 111 provides a good dental triage service. People who call them with an urgent problem are directed to their nearest urgent treatment centre with capacity to see them.

10. Dental surgeries are increasingly choosing to terminate their NHS contract and many people are having to pay for private treatment. This is quote is typical of what people tell us:

"I have had no choice but to go private (dental) despite paying NI and working for the NHS, and it being an entitlement"

11. The current message from NHS England is that people who need emergency care are being seen and people with acute, severe dental issues are being stabilised. Specific groups, for example, Looked After Children, are receiving more of a proactive health promotion approach.

Action required by the Board

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

Author

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