

## **Healthwatch Update for Local Dental Network**

### **Volume of Dentistry Feedback**

Within the past 6 months 164 people have actively contacted Healthwatch North Yorkshire regarding dentistry. Dentistry continues to be the number one topic we receive feedback about, over and above the feedback we receive regarding other topics such as GP services and hospital care.

The 5 key issues we are hearing about relating to dentistry are outlined below:

#### **1. Lack of NHS dentists for people to register with**

A large majority of the feedback received is regarding people being unable to register with an NHS dentist. People who have just moved to the area, those who have been struck off their dental practice register, have had their dental practice close down or switch to only offering private treatment have been forced to try to register with a new practice. However, the large majority are unable to find a practice taking on new patients, meaning some travel very long distances to access NHS dental services or cannot access dental services at all.

Access to information regarding where you can register with an NHS dentist continues to be poor, and the online NHS service finder to search for a local dentist often has out of date information. There are also concerns around NHS 111 and that 'urgent' problems are not considered urgent enough, meaning people are living in pain.

"Our dentist of the past 30 years suddenly closed and although I have rung all practices within a 20/25-mile radius I cannot get on one list. My husband was in the middle of a course of treatment and I will soon need a check-up. What do we do? Ringing 111 has proved spectacularly ineffective".

#### **2. Long waiting times to register**

Those on waiting lists to join a practice with an NHS dentist have expressed their frustration with the length of the wait time, which tends to vary between 3-5 years. Some dental practices have up to 1,000 people on their waiting list.

"I have called tens of surgeries and many are not accepting NHS patients or have a 3-5 year waiting list. I have also called the NHS helpline to locate a dentist, but all the surgeries they recommended for me to contact didn't accept new patients. The NHS advice was to go private".

#### **3. People being forced to go private**

Many people have informed us that when they try to register with an NHS dentist they are told there is no availability for NHS patients but they could be seen as a private patient. However, some treatments can cost hundreds to thousands of pounds, and many cannot afford this option.

One person who contacted us had serious issues with their gums and has been trying to get NHS treatment but have only been offered private treatment at a cost of £4,000.

#### **4. Impact on other aspects of life (e.g., mental health, employment)**

Being unable to register with an NHS dentist has also had a negative impact on other aspects of people's lives such as on their mental health and employment. One person who contacted us from Selby was on a three-year waiting list to get NHS free services. They were in a vicious cycle whereby they felt unable to afford to pay for treatment (due to being unemployed) and yet felt that no one would employ them looking the way they did. This secondary impact means further strain is being placed on already overstretched services such as mental health support services.

"Our son, who is 15 needs to see the orthodontist as [he] requires braces and we've been told it could be three years + before he might be seen and [have] been told to go private. The cost to do this is very expensive and we just can't afford to do this. Our son is very conscious about how his teeth are and doesn't want to smile and gets frustrated that he is teased by others in and out of school. I'm sure this has an effect on his mental well-being".

#### **5. Effect on children's oral health**

Some feedback has been regarding people being unable to access treatment for their children, raising concerns around the long-term impact this might have on children's oral health. We have also received feedback from pregnant mothers who have been unable to access treatment even though they are entitled to free NHS dental services.

#### **Latest Research and Reports**

Healthwatch North Yorkshire have completed 3 reports looking at dentistry:

<https://bit.ly/HWNYRHBR>

This report from September 2021 gives the results of a survey following a provider in Robin's Hood Bay handing back their NHS contract.

Key messages: The survey results demonstrate a strong desire for NHS services to be available in the Robin Hood's Bay area but also evidence a willingness to travel to larger areas nearby, such as Whitby, and Scarborough.

<https://bit.ly/HWNYSDR>

This report from September 2021 provides the results from 3 focus groups looking at NHS dentistry in Scarborough as part of the procurement process following closures of dental surgeries in the area.

Key messages: The report demonstrates a strong desire for NHS dentistry in the area. Respondents made it clear that they wanted accessible, affordable, friendly, and regular dentistry.

[NHS Dentistry in North Yorkshire: 1-Year Review of Public Feedback \(healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk\)](https://healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk)

This report, from August 2021 provides a review of the 176 pieces of feedback and signpost requests received regarding dentistry between 15th May 2020 and 14th May 2021.

Key messages: Lack of clarity around which dental practices listed on NHS Choices are providing NHS treatment. Many cannot register with an NHS dentist and waiting lists can be as long as 3 years. People are being forced to pay for private treatment where they can afford it. Feedback regarding lack of access to treatment for children and pregnant mothers.

### **What Else We Know**

Healthwatch England have published their Annual Report. NHS Dentistry is featured - [20220203 Healthwatch England Annual Report Final.pdf](#) with talk of the twin crises of access and affordability. They are also calling for urgent reform of dental commissioning.