

Update on NHS General Dental Access Northumberland

Northumberland OSC
Meeting of 01 February 2022

NHS England and NHS Improvement



Background/context



- Primary care dental services must operate in strict accordance with National Dental Regulation (2006). As such evidenced compliance with General Dental Services Contract Regulations, Dental Charge Regulations & Performers List Regulations must be demonstrated by NHS commissioners and dental services locally.
- A key point of note is that NHS Dentistry is highly regulated and that the regulations unlike those for General Medical Practice do not allow for NHS Dental Patient Registration. NHS Dentistry contracts and provision by contrast is activity and demand led!
- The expectation being that practices deliver and manage their available commissioned activity to best meet the immediate needs of any patient presenting. This is achieved by the practice entering into an agreed and formal signed course of treatment with each patient.
- The national dental contract regulations set out the contract currency as being units of dental activity (UDAs), which are then attributable to the 'banded' courses of NHS Dental treatment that are prescribed under the regulations i.e. Band 1 Urgent, Band 1, Band 2, Band 3.
- Not all types of Dental Treatment are available on the NHS e.g. Implants

Background/context continued



- NHS England do not commission private dental services, private dental practice is regulated by the Care Quality Commission and dentist regulation is undertaken by the General Dental Council
- National NHS Dentistry Regulation and Contracts do not prohibit the provision of Private Dentistry by Dental Practices
- National NHS Dentistry Regulation does require, where dental practices hold NHS Contracts and offer both NHS/Private dental care, that patients are offered a full and transparent choice of available NHS/Private options to allow patients to make an informed choice of care.
- Health Education England are the National and Regional organisation that develop and implement national dental workforce strategy, planning and implementation.
- This includes the funding, allocation of places and distribution of dental students across the country. In addition they plan and develop training and support to allow additional NHS workforce to be secured allowing overseas dentists and private dentists to secure controlled access onto the NHS Dental Performers List.
- We have been working with local Healthwatch organisations across the North East to produce and disseminate an NHS Dental Myth Busting guide to help improve patient and public understanding of how NHS Dentistry operates nationally and locally under regulation.

General Dental Access provision



- There are 42 dental practices across Northumberland contracted to provide general dental access with 568,070 units of dental activity (UDAs) commissioned.
- In 2019-20 (pre-Covid) approximately 90% of the total commissioned capacity in Northumberland had been utilised, demonstrating that at that time we were reasonably meeting the dental needs of the population.
- However, we acknowledge the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on access for patients and would like to provide reassurance that we are working with practices to explore all options available to increase access for patients locally, working within the constraints of national regulations and separately nationally mandated COVID Pandemic policy.
- Urgent and Emergency services are also available to patients out-with general dental practices via NHS 111. Where patients present into NHS 111 they will be remotely triaged and where clinically appropriate be booked into the nearest in hours or out of hours treatment centre or alternatively be provided with self-care advice and sign-posting.

NHS Dentistry Pressures & Challenges



Dental Workforce – Recruitment & Retention

A significant risk to both sustaining existing or improving levels of NHS Dentistry access and Oral Health is dental workforce recruitment and retention (dentists and more recently dental nurses).

This is a national problem but is creating significant pressures in an increasing number of local North Cumbria and North East localities including Northumberland.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID Pandemic has created a range of risks and pressures for NHS dentistry that are similar to those being faced by the wider NHS.

- NHS dental sector in particular has faced significant challenges during the pandemic due to the proximity between a dental professional and a patient's airways and the relatively high proportion of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) undertaken that increase the likelihood of COVID-19 infection spread and result in 'surgery fallow periods' that keep patients safe.
- To ensure the safety of patients and staff all NHS dental practices are required to comply with both national NHS Dentistry clinical standard operating procedures and national infection prevention control measures. The impact of which has and continues to result in NHS dentistry services operating throughout the Pandemic period at significantly lower levels of capacity than would normally be available.
- In view of this reduced capacity and in line with the national standard operating procedures, dentists are required to prioritise patients based on 'clinical need' and 'urgency' into their available treatment capacity, i.e.
 - Patients seeking clinically confirmed urgent or emergency dental care
 - Patients with greatest clinical need or at high risk of oral health deterioration e.g. children
- This results in delays being experienced by patients seeking non-clinically urgent and more routine dental care such as check up's etc, whilst the Pandemic constraints remain in place.

Safely Restoring Access



- The contractual arrangements for NHS dentistry through the pandemic have reflected the need to prioritise patient safety, urgent care access and practice sustainability.
- During the first phase of the pandemic in the interest of patient and dental staff safety, all routine dental services were paused and a small number of urgent dental care centres (UDCs) were established to provide access for patients with clinical urgent care needs.
- In the second phase of the pandemic response, as infection rates dropped, all practices re-opened for face to face care and have steadily increased activity in accordance with Nationally published and mandated guidance over time.
- National NHS Dentistry guidance to date has required all practices to meet reduced activity thresholds (taking into account IPC measures at each point in time), whilst ensuring the continued prioritisation of patients with clinical urgent care needs. The national thresholds set were/are as follows:
 - 20% between July - December 2020;
 - 45% between January - March 2021;
 - 60% between April - September 2021;
 - 65% between September - December 2021
 - 85% between January - March 2022 (current Q4 national dental guidance)
- Whilst restoration of NHS dental activity continues, a return to full capacity will be dependent on the further easing of COVID-19 infection prevention control measures and publication of further National NHS Dental Guidance, which will be due at the end of March 2022.

- Incentives for ALL NHS dental practices to prioritise patients who have not been seen in the practice within the previous (24 months) adults and 12 months (children) who require urgent dental care to supplement the existing in hours urgent dental care centres commissioned to provide urgent dental care slots on referral via NHS111
- Implemented In Hours Urgent Dental Care Centre capacity directly bookable via NHS 111 into sites located in North Northumberland (Berwick), Central Northumberland (Alnwick), South East Northumberland (Blyth & Ashington), West Northumberland (RVI Dental Hospital)
- Additional capacity commissioned from the out of hours urgent dental care service from April to the end of August 2021 to provide additional resilience to manage peaks in demand during weekend and bank holiday periods.
- Increased investment into the new Dental Out of Hours Service contracts from 01 Oct 2021 to ensure we have sustainable capacity available to treat 'clinically confirmed' urgent and emergency patient's that present via NHS 111.
- Investment in additional clinical triage capacity within the out of hours integrated NHS111 North East and North Cumbria Dental Clinical Assessment Service.

Access – Next Steps



- Continuing to offer incentives to existing practices to prioritise patients who have not been seen in the practice within the previous (24 months) adults and 12 months (children) who require urgent dental care;
- Continuing to monitor and seek expressions of interest from practices who have the capacity and capability to deliver additional in-hours access until the end of March 2022 with a focus on urgent care and access for nationally identified high risk groups, i.e. children.
- Continue to work with all practices to support them to maximise their clinical treatment capacity within the constraints of nationally mandated regulation, policy and guidance.
- Ensuring in accordance with new Q4 National Guidance that practices maintain short notice cancellation lists in order to proactively contact patients to offer appointments to ensure that any clinical downtime is minimised.
- Offering payment for additional activity above existing contracted levels, subject to a cap of +10% to ensure that additional patient access can be offered (subject to IPC measures and workforce availability).
- Pro-actively engaging with Health Education England and their delivery partners to encourage and support the development of new initiatives and opportunities that can improve recruitment and retention of dentists and dental team staff moving forward.

Summary – key points to note



- All NHS dental practices still operating at significant reduced capacity due to requirement to continue to adhere to national infection control guidance.
- Continued need for dental practices to triage patients who contact them to ensure that patients with the greatest clinical need, i.e. those requiring urgent dental care and vulnerable patients are prioritised, which likely means a continuing delay for patients seeking non-clinically urgent and more routine dental care such as check's ups.
- Progression to resume the full range of routine dental care is being risk-managed by individual practices in compliance with Nationally mandated COVID Pandemic standard operating procedures.
- This position is likely to continue until at least end of March 2022, when we are expecting further National Dental & IPC Guidance to be published.
- All opportunities are being explored to increase the clinical treatment capacity available locally, ensuring that we operate within the constraints of current national COVID Pandemic guidance.
- In the interim we are asking patients for their understanding and co-operation during this unprecedented and difficult time for the NHS.

THANK YOU