

The 'Tooth be Told' - Executive Summary

Healthwatch Kent has been hearing from people about their issues relating to NHS dental services. These issues ranged from accessing a dentist, confusion around payment and feedback about the treatment itself. This led us to commission a piece of research to help us gain a better understanding of local people's experiences of dental services.

A full copy of the report is available on our website www.healthwatchkent.co.uk

What did we find?

- The majority of people we spoke to were unsure what to do if they had a dental problem out of normal working hours
- Information from Kent Dental Helpline was sometimes not up to date; the service was also not well known
- In November and December 2015, we heard that none of the 15 NHS dentists within the Tunbridge Wells town area were offering new places or appointments to new patients; in January 2016, three of the 15 had availability
- People's views and knowledge of the bands of treatment, NHS dental charges and exemptions were varied
- Patients were unaware of how to complain about their treatment or their dentist
- The cost of private dentistry and lack of NHS dentistry means that some people don't go to the dentist at all
- People perceived that NHS treatment was of a lesser quality and more difficult to secure than private
- Getting dental treatment for older people living in care homes is a real problem
- One of the six care homes we spoke to had regular, contracted NHS-funded domiciliary dental provision; awareness and use of the Community Dental Service-led NHS domiciliary provision varied
- One care home reported that some of their residents who are wheelchair users are able to get into the surgery, but not able to get into the dentist chair; awareness of the Community Dental Service's accessible clinics varied and the distance to the nearest clinic was raised

Our recommendations

- 1) Ensure that Kent Dental Helpline provides up to date and accurate information
- 2) Provide clear, easy to understand information to the public about Kent Dental Helpline, and DentaLine Out of Hours Emergency Dental Service provision: Healthwatch Kent has created two new leaflets to help the public better understand dental prices and how to find an NHS dentist. These should be used by all Kent dentists and shared in other health and community venues, such as GP practices and children's centres.
- 3) The views of patients need to be considered when assessments and decisions about dental provision are made.
- 4) All dentists should clearly display Healthwatch Kent information to explain how people can share confidential feedback on their experience, whether good or bad.
- 5) Access to NHS dentists needs to be improved, particularly for those that are least able to access or afford private dentists

- 6) Work with dentist practices to listen to local people's concerns so that current differences in terms of access, getting an appointment, information about charges and how people can find an NHS dentist are addressed
- 7) The needs of and best clinical dental care provision options for older people living in care homes should be addressed; care homes and their residents should be engaged in this conversation with providers and commissioners
- 8) Ensure accurate information is shared with the public, including care homes, about accessible dental facilities and domiciliary provision. The Community Dental Service can provide domiciliary care where clinically appropriate, and its clinics have ceiling hoists in their premises; patients can be referred to this service. Examine the public views of these services in order to address any barriers, such as distance, to accessing this provision

If you have any experiences of NHS dentists (good or bad) we would love to hear from you. Contact us anytime for free on 0808 801 0102 or email info@healthwatchkent.co.uk to share your experience in confidence.