

Update on NHS General Dental Services for Children and Young People Gateshead

Families OSC
Meeting of 03 February 2022

NHS England and NHS Improvement



Background/context



- Primary care dental services operate in accordance with the National Dental Regulations and must evidence compliance with General Dental Services Regulations and Dental Charge Regulations.
- A key point of note is that the regulations unlike those for General Medical Practice do not allow for Patient Registration. NHS Dentistry contracts and provision is activity and demand led with the expectation that practices deliver and manage their available commissioned activity to best meet the immediate needs of any patient presenting by entering into an agreed and formal signed course of treatment.
- The national regulations set out the contract currency which is measured in units of dental activity (UDAs) that are attributable to a 'banded' course of NHS treatment prescribed under the regulations.
- Not all types of Dental Treatment are available on the NHS e.g. Implants are not usually available.
- 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

Background/context continued



- 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 organisation that develop and implement national and local dental workforce strategies including:
 - the funding and distribution of dentist and dental workforce student numbers and training places;
 - Planning and development of training and support to facilitate entry of overseas and private dentists onto the NHS Dental Performers List which is required to enable them to deliver NHS dental services.

General Dental Access provision



- There are 24 dental practices across Gateshead contracted to provide general dental services – 364,347 units of dental activity (UDAs) commissioned.
- In 2019-20 (pre-Covid) approximately 98.30% of the total commissioned capacity in Gateshead was utilised. 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.
- Urgent and Emergency out of hours service is available, accessible via NHS 111. All patients contacting the service are triaged and where clinically appropriate booked into the nearest in hours or out of hours treatment centre.

NHS Dentistry Pressures & Challenges



Dental Workforce – Recruitment & Retention

A 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), although the position in Gateshead is better than in other parts of the region.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID Pandemic has created a range of risks and pressures for NHS dentistry that are not too dissimilar 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.
- To ensure the safety of patients and staff all NHS dental practices are required to comply with a national standard operating procedure and infection prevention control (IPC) measures, the impact of which has resulted in NHS dentistry operating at significantly lower levels of capacity since 2020 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, ie
 - Patients seeking urgent or emergency dental care.
 - Patients with greatest oral health needs - attending to incomplete care plans and reaching out to high needs dental patients and vulnerable groups most at risk of avoidable dental disease **including children**.
- This likely means a delay for patients seeking non-clinically urgent and more routine dental care such as check up's.
- Progression to resume the full range of routine dental being risk-managed by individual practices and this position is likely to continue until at least the end of March 2022.

- The contractual arrangements for NHS dentistry through the pandemic have reflected the need to prioritise patient safety, patient access and practice sustainability.
- During the first wave of the pandemic in the interest of patient and dental staff safety, routine dental services were paused and urgent dental care centres (UDCs) were established to provide access to urgent care.
- In the second phase of the response, as infection rates dropped, all practices re-opened for face to face care and have steadily increased activity.
- National NHS Dentistry guidance to date has required all practices to meet reduced minimum 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 are as follows:
 - 20% of normal activity volumes between July to December 2020
 - 45% between January to March 2021;
 - 60% between April to September 2021;
 - 65% between September to December 2021; and
 - 85% between January to December 2022 (current national 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 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
- 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 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 that operates from 6pm until 9am Monday to Friday and 24 hours at the weekend.

- Continuing to offer local 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;
- Seeking 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, ie 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 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 infection prevention control measures and workforce availability).
- Proactively engage 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 where required.

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.
- It is therefore necessary for dental practices to triage patients who contact them to ensure that patients with the greatest clinical need, ie those requiring urgent dental care and vulnerable patients are prioritised, which likely means a 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.
- This position is likely to continue until at least end of March 2022.
- All opportunities are being explored to increase the clinical treatment capacity available as quickly as possible
- Children are identified as a priority group for recall
- NHS dental care for children is free.

THANK YOU