

# PRIMARY CARE DENTAL SERVICES IN DORSET



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## SUMMARY

Healthwatch Dorset has received many comments relating to NHS dental services across Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth, a number of which relate to lack of clarity about NHS dental charges and concerns about how to find an NHS dentist. Healthwatch England has also recently undertaken a review of dental services focusing on access to and quality of services (more below). Discussions we had with the NHS England Wessex (now NHS England South) Primary Care Contract Manager also highlighted concerns about whether patients are informed about NHS dental charges prior to treatment, whether patients seeking NHS dental treatment are treated differently to those who seek private care and whether patients are able to receive all treatment clinically necessary as NHS care. To develop awareness of the local situation, to feed into the evidence gathered nationally by Healthwatch England and others and to highlight areas of concern to NHS England South, Healthwatch Dorset undertook a review of NHS dental services in Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth with particular interest to:

1. Ascertain whether people can easily access current information about which practices are accepting new NHS patients.
2. Identify if dental charges are made clear to people (whether information is clear and accurate when given verbally or on websites).

The review had three components:

- The feedback we had already received from patients and the public (through our website, via community engagement events, through Citizens Advice Bureaux, via feedback forms and other engagement opportunities).

- A “mystery shopping exercise” conducted by telephone.
- A comparison of information provided on practice websites with that on the NHS Choices website.

Overall, in the “mystery shopping exercise” callers were greeted with courtesy and attended to promptly. But findings also suggest that there is some work to be done in ensuring that information about which practices are accepting NHS patients is accurate and easily accessible. As a result, our recommendations for dental practices include reviewing web-based data and providing staff with the relevant information to signpost people to appropriate sources of advice.

## THANKS

Healthwatch Dorset would like to thank all the volunteer Healthwatch Champions who took part in the *Mystery Shopping* review.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Healthwatch is the national independent consumer champion in health and social care established throughout England in 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and with statutory powers to ensure the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. Healthwatch exists in two distinct forms - local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England at national level.
- 1.2. Healthwatch Dorset is one of 148 local Healthwatch organisations with a dual role to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public. The remit of local Healthwatch encompasses all publicly funded health and social care services for both adults and children. Healthwatch Dorset covers the area of the three local authorities of Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth.
- 1.3. Healthwatch Dorset collects feedback from people of all ages and from all parts of the community, through community events; contact with community groups; comment cards which people send to us in the post; online through web site and social media; from callers to our telephone helpline; and through the Citizens Advice Bureaux in Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth, all of whom offer a face-to-face service. As part of the remit to gather views Healthwatch Dorset also has the power to “enter & view” services and undertake announced and unannounced visits.
- 1.4. The following report documents the findings of a review of primary care dental practices across Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth - the objectives of the work being to better understand the experience people have of accessing NHS dental care.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Everyone is entitled to receive all clinically necessary dental treatment through the NHS (NHS Choices website, 2014) although research undertaken by Healthwatch England in August 2014 suggests one of the biggest issues people face is actually finding a practice that is accepting new NHS patients in the first place. Their research found that “in some areas just 1 in 5 practices were accepting new NHS patients”. Healthwatch England found that (2014) the NHS Choices website (holds signposting information for NHS services in England) showed just under half the country’s 8000 dental practices were accepting new NHS patients.
- 2.2 Each individual practice manages their own details on NHS Choices but many practices fail to keep them up to date, which can result in frustration for patients trying to access services. There is no contractual obligation or regulation requiring practices to keep these details up to date but Healthwatch is calling on NHS England and the Department of Health to address this and other concerns raised by their research in the review of the Dentist Contract expected this year (2015).
- 2.3 Chair of Healthwatch England Anna Bradley stated in the report “We hear a lot in the news about people struggling to access their GPs but it would seem getting an appointment with an NHS dentist is even more frustrating! Patients are constantly being fed confusing and inaccurate information about who is and isn’t currently offering NHS treatment, and are feeling like they have to opt for costly private treatments such as hygienist appointments so that they don’t get struck off the books. It’s simply not acceptable and such basic consumer concerns must be addressed when the Dentist Contract comes up for renewal.”

- 2.4 The following statement from NHS Choices was in response to the Healthwatch England report: “NHS Choices provides every NHS dentist with the opportunity to tell local people about their services, including an indication of whether they are currently accepting NHS patients for new courses of treatment. Whenever we hear from the public or bodies such as Healthwatch England that information is not up to date for a particular practice, we contact the practice. This is our opportunity to help and encourage them to provide accurate information. Each dentist’s page on NHS Choices has a facility for the public to alert us if they see a problem with the information we have published. This is a very valuable in helping us fix any problems. We urge both the public and Healthwatch England to provide us with detail of any errors.”
- 2.5 Also in response to the Healthwatch England report, Dr. Barry Cockcroft, NHS England’s chief dental officer advised “Our figures tell us that 93% of people who tried to get an NHS dental appointment in the past two years were successful. Of the 6.5% who tried to get an NHS dental appointment at a practice that they had never attended before, 76% were successful. Dental practices update their own information on the NHS Choices website. It can be difficult for practices to do this as the capacity to see new patients might vary from day to day, especially for small practices. We will be looking, with them, at ways that this process can be improved”.
- 2.6 Healthwatch Dorset has received many comments relating to dental services across Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth. Most of the comments received concern issues with locating an NHS dentist accepting patients, issues around quality of treatment and lack of clarity on costs and charges (especially for people on low incomes or receiving income support/employment support allowance). This feedback and the work undertaken by Healthwatch England and Which? (2015) through their “Clean Up Dental Costs” campaign led to

Healthwatch Dorset embarking on a project to gain an understanding of the current situation across Dorset in terms of accessing NHS dental care and whether patients are provided with clear and accessible information about costs and charges, identifying areas of good practice and making recommendations for improvements where appropriate.

### 3. FEEDBACK RECEIVED FROM PATIENTS AND THE PUBLIC

The following is a sample of the feedback on dental services that we have received from patients and the public - through our website, via community engagement events, through Citizens Advice Bureaux, via our feedback forms and other engagement opportunities. Most of the comments we have received concern issues with locating an NHS dentist accepting patients, issues around quality of treatment and lack of clarity on costs and charges (especially for people on low incomes or receiving income support/employment support allowance).

- “I am a traveller and I pay my taxes and I work, I have never claimed any benefits and I get on well with the local community, they know me well. I lived in Dorset a long time but when I use health services it is always the same, as soon as they find out I am a traveller they look at me differently. I went to the dentist and they said to me “So which tooth do you want removed?” before I even said anything, they assumed I just need an extraction because I live on the road, and I just came for my regular check up! I look after my health and pay for my dental visit like everyone else, I don’t earn much but don’t want any benefits so I pay for my NHS dentist and they treat me as a second class citizen”.
- “Tried to get emergency dentist telephone number from 111, after numerous phone calls back and forth between different 111 telephonists I was called by a very unhappy doctor who told me in no uncertain terms that he was not a dentist and couldn't help me and that I was wasting his time, I still do not know emergency dentist number...shocking!”
- The caller was frantically trying to locate and be able to join a dental surgery in the Christchurch/Bournemouth area. She didn’t belong to a dental practice and needed to join one as she had received a letter from

Southampton Hospital stating (she read it out) that they would cancel her heart operation unless she was able to have a dentist check her mouth, gums and teeth before the operation could be deemed safe and therefore take place. As she is due to have a triple heart bypass she was very worried about not being able to find one and the operation being cancelled. She said she had called about 15 dentists (numbers that she had found in the telephone book and numbers her friends had given and found for her). Unfortunately there was either no capacity to take her on or there was a waiting list of 3 months, even though she was prepared to pay privately as a one off. Even though she explained the urgency of her situation, it didn't seem to help, as no one could accommodate. (Note - we were able to finally signpost to a dentist who could help).

- Mrs A went for a check up on xx but had to go back a few days later because of discomfort in her jaw. The dentist checked the right but not the left. Mrs A still had a lot of discomfort so she went back to the dentist to ask if it would be possible to have an x-ray. The dentist said she would have to go to the hospital for that, but there would be a long wait. Mrs A had paid a deposit of £20 and £17.50 was charged for the second visit. Mrs A thought that she would not be required to pay for the second visit as it was so soon after the first. She told the receptionist this but was told this wasn't the case.
- Mrs C has been with X dental practice for about 12 years. Recently she was asked if she could register with another dentist because they couldn't cope with the pressures of disabled patients who use wheelchairs, etc. She would be grateful if someone could explain to her why she is being asked to leave the Practice without being given any assistance to find another.
- "I have no permanent residence so I find it really hard to access a dentist. Emergency dentists are very expensive".

- Caller has dentures. These are causing him pain and discomfort and he is unable to eat hard food. As a consequence he has lost 20kg in the last three months. His dentist is not able to refer him for dental implants, as he doesn't match the criteria.
- Caller has had bowel cancer and secondary liver cancer. His teeth are falling out as a result of chemotherapy and he advised he could not get free dental treatment because he had not been to dentist for two years and thus dropped from the list. He was having chemotherapy all that time.
- Person calling on behalf of her elderly and frail father (age 82) who requires a tooth removing, but whose own dentist will not do so due to client's numerous health conditions; liver disease, diabetes and heart disease, in case anything goes wrong during the procedure. Dentist made referral to another practice locally that will take on such cases, but the waiting list for an appointment is 27 weeks. Father has terrible toothache and this is too long to wait. Caller didn't know what to do.
- "There's not enough information about dental costs. I pay privately and it's expensive. If I understood the NHS charging system and knew how to find a dentist taking NHS patients, I would change".
- Mrs M called to ask how she could find a new dentist in her area when she doesn't have access to the Internet.
- "Children's dental provision in Dorchester isn't very good. My children have seen more than 6 dentists in the last couple of years. My eldest daughter had a tooth removed by one dentist only to be told by the dentist who replaced them a few months later that the tooth had been removed needlessly. Also, despite being referred months ago, we're still waiting for an appointment with an orthodontist".

- “I attended a routine dental check and was sent to Poole Hospital for a rapid referral to the oral/maxilla facial surgery team. I was seen by the consultant, who gave me excellent care. I felt in safe hands. Within a very short time frame, I was assessed, had 2 biopsy/excisions and received my results. Thank you so much to both the referring dentist (who was a locum) and to the team at Poole”.
  
- Caller’s wife was referred to X Hospital to have a tooth extracted. The tooth that needed to be removed was also an anchor for a bridge, so the bridge would have to be removed as well. When she arrived at the hospital she was told that there were no facilities to remove the bridge and that this should have been done by the dentist. Dental Practice Manager was called to discuss and call became difficult. The surgeon then rang the practice herself to speak to the practice manager and an immediate appointment with Mr X was booked. When patient and caller arrived Mr X asked what the problem was and then called caller over to tell him where wife wanted the bridge cut. Caller told him that he was no expert in dentistry and didn't know where it should be cut. Twice again he was asked. Wife was shaking at this point, so caller said that he would leave the room and let him get on with it. The dentist refused to let him leave and then said that he was glad that caller had a coat on as he was going to get sprayed with water. Wife left the practice very shaken up and in great distress. In addition, caller feels dentist endangered her health by demanding that he, a person totally unqualified in dentistry had to decide a dental procedure and was stopped from leaving the room.
  
- “I was told at an appointment that I needed an extraction of 2 teeth at the Hospital - I was told to contact Boscombe for a letter to be sent from them to me with a choice of hospitals to attend. After several calls to them they told me an appointment at Poole Hospital had been made. I told them that due to my disability I couldn't travel to Poole as it's too far and asked why my letter had not arrived for me to choose a hospital. I was told that it had been posted, I then received the letter on 5th March and appointment was

made for 1st April, which was the first emergency appointment. I have seen dental services Bournemouth who after the visit have now given me an appointment for extraction. For 3 whole months I have been in constant pain and have felt like pulling them out myself. I already take so many painkillers and no one cares. I made a formal complaint to the dentist and received a letter saying there was nothing they can do because I refused the appointment at Poole. I was not offered any type of follow up, only to ring if I needed an appointment.”

- Caller had a root infection and lost a tooth, the dentist recommended a plate for £219 saying if caller wasn't happy with that she could change it for a bridge, Caller wasn't happy with the plate so returned to the dentists, the receptionist said a bridge would cost £219 also but when caller went into to see the dentist he quoted £1000 plus as she couldn't have it on NHS as she had already had a plate on NHS so the bridge would need to be done privately. Caller is cross that this was not made clear to start with as she would have had the bridge done in the first place.
- Caller visited dentist and had impressions taken for false teeth. Had teeth out at the hospital. False teeth don't fit properly. The dentist referred her back to the hospital claiming that her teeth were not completely removed. The hospital has referred her back to the dentist because the teeth were not made properly. The dentist that treated her initially has now left and another dentist has said she needs to have new false teeth made. Dentist has told her she must pay for the new ones. She has tried, without success, to speak to the practice manager and has been told that teeth can only be replaced free of charge within 2 months of being supplied but this problem has been caused by the dentists so caller should not have to pay.
- “I wasn't clearly informed about NHS prices for a filling before the work. This difficult & sudden unexpected cost was a serious burden and made me feel misled”.

- “My wife was advised by her NHS dentist that she needed replacement dentures fitted. He also advised her, while he was seeing her as an NHS patient, that he could offer private treatment, which would provide a better quality set of dentures. We agreed to this but the dentures are not suitable, they are very painful and she cannot eat properly. We were misled and given poor quality treatment”.
  
- “I needed a tooth extraction following an emergency appointment with the dentist. It was done under the NHS for £49. I was told I needed another extraction, which was scheduled for another date. This extraction took a little longer than the first one, after which I was asked to sign a form, explaining that it had been done under private practice. The fee for this was £145. I went back the day after treatment when I fully realised that it had been done privately. I asked for an explanation for this and was informed that it was performed privately because it took longer than normal. I didn’t plan for this extra cost and I wasn’t told beforehand that it was going to be done privately”.
  
- “I was told I needed root canal treatment and a crown. The dentist said he could do the crown but not the root canal but didn’t say why not and said I had to go to another dentist, NHS or private. I went to the CAB to get some help before going back to the dentist. CAB rang the British Dental Health Foundation and they said root canal is standard treatment that any qualified dentist should be able to undertake, under cost banding 2. They said the dentist should tell me why he can’t do the treatment (NHS payment too low???) and that he should offer me other options like referring me to another NHS dentist who can do the root canal or to an NHS specialist if it’s complex. Thanks to the CAB I feel well armed now to go back to the dentist”.

- “I have a complaint regarding access to NHS Dental Treatment for Gum Disease. I am unable to get treatment through the NHS. I don’t have a complaint with my dental practice directly (the dentist is good) but rather the lack of pressure on practices that do deliver NHS services to provide all services for their patients. I need a regular hygienist service which is often a BAND 2 NHS charge which would cost £49.00 for non-surgical treatment of periodontitis. However my practice hires a private Hygienist and is not available to me as a NHS patient and I have to pay privately as they are not obliged to give treatment”.
  
- “The dentist looks at teeth but will not clean or polish! She sends you to a hygienist, which is chargeable (£40). I do not pay for my treatment (over 60 and GP credit) and I have said this and refused to pay but have been told that I cannot have my teeth done until I pay!!”
  
- “My dentist said the treatment would cost approximately £200 under the NHS. I can’t afford it and no one told me about any help to pay schemes so I haven’t had the work done. I only found out about help by going to Citizens Advice”.
  
- “I have MS and severely limited mobility and high care needs. I had to pay £199 dental charges despite being on a low income. No information was given to me by dental surgery on help with dental charges”.
  
- “Called 111 for NHS emergency dentist appointment. Obtained appointment OK, went last week for initial consultation. Was told to come back this week, as needs an extraction. Was told today must have apt with hygienist BEFORE they’ll do the extraction & this will cost £50. Not prepared to even make an appt. without prior payment. Am on benefits & don’t have the money”.

## 4. MYSTERY SHOPPING TELEPHONE EXERCISE

### METHODOLOGY

- Mystery Shopping is defined by the Market Research Society (2011) as *“The use of individuals trained to experience and measure any customer service process, by acting as potential customers and in some way reporting back on their experiences in a detailed and objective way”*. This method was chosen for a number of reasons: Healthwatch Dorset has good capacity within its volunteer Healthwatch Champions to undertake a large project over a sizeable geographic area: Mystery Shopping allows the actual experience of the person to be revealed: Mystery Shopping provides the methodology to assess, in real-time, the actual experience of people on different days and at different times of the day.
- Volunteers were recruited and were required to complete an application form and to sign up to the Nolan Principles of Public Life and to the Healthwatch Dorset Code of Conduct. Any volunteer who advised that they were currently pursuing a health or social care complaint was not accepted to take part in this review.
- All volunteers were provided with background information, guidance on how to undertake Mystery Shopping, safeguarding information, templates, checklists and related documents. Volunteers were given the choice of day and time to make their calls.
- The list of questions and scorecard (Appendix) needed to be limited in length and complexity to keep call times to a minimum and to ensure that volunteers were able to act as normally as possible and without the need to refer to a “crib sheet”. All calls were undertaken between November and December 2014. Both qualitative and quantitative information was gathered.

- Although Mystery Shopping is an objective and factual exercise and the aim is to document exactly what happens “at point of contact”, for this piece of work Healthwatch Dorset wanted to establish how the person felt about the way their enquiries were dealt with and whether they felt they were given the information/guidance/support they needed. Therefore they were asked to rate their overall satisfaction using the scale “0: didn’t meet expectations” “1: met expectations” and “2: excellent service”.
- Healthwatch Dorset acknowledges that single interactions cannot necessarily be used to characterise any one practice’s normal response to queries i.e. a different day, a different member of staff and even a different patient’s approach may illicit a different response. It is also recognised that different volunteers will have differing views on what is satisfactory or not satisfactory. However, this review aims to provide a “snapshot” evaluation of whether there are inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the information people are given (compared to what they are entitled to receive) and not a full and comprehensive inspection.

## FINDINGS OF THE MYSTERY SHOPPING EXERCISE

- Dental practices have not been individually named in this report. The review provides a “snapshot in time” and therefore does not necessarily show a true representation of what happens in a particular practice on a regular basis, so naming practices would not be appropriate. However, Healthwatch Dorset retains the right to comment publically about any organisation that receives public money for providing public health or social care services for residents of Dorset, where we judge that this would be in the public interest.

- NHS England (Wessex) supplied a comprehensive list of all dental practices (132). We found 1 practice was closed: 21 stated, when called, that they were private only: 6 were either specialists or hospital surgeries (i.e. not “high street” and therefore only take referrals): no response was received from 1 practice even after numerous calls at different times and on different days of the week.
- 105 NHS dental practices in Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth were called. Calls were undertaken on various days of the week and at various times of the day. (Note - calls were not made to specialist dental practices or acute hospital dental specialisms.)
- The percentage of practices currently accepting new NHS patients (based on number of non-private practices): 53%.
- Location of practices accepting new NHS patients (as at end of 2014)

Location	Number of practices
Bournemouth	15
Poole	7
Dorchester	4
Weymouth	3
Lyme Regis	2
Christchurch	2
Swanage	1
Blandford	1
Gillingham	1
Wimborne	1
Sherborne	1
Sturminster Newton	1
Wareham	1
Verwood	1

Greeting & Welcome	Didn't meet expectations	Met expectations	Excellent Service	NA
Was the phone answered promptly?	9%	21%	70%	
Did the practice identify themselves?	3%	22%	75%	
Did they answer with professional tone?	1%	30%	69%	
Was the call well paced?	4%	40%	56%	
Did they thank caller at end?	8%	20%	72%	
Customer Service	Didn't meet expectations	Met expectations	Excellent Service	NA
Did practice understand request?	2%	32%	66%	
Did they ask to clarify request if needed?	4%	21%	19%	56%

Did they demonstrate willingness to help?	5%	46%	49%	
Overall Professionalism	Didn't meet expectations	Met expectations	Excellent Service	NA
Were they friendly?	1%	34%	65%	
Were they courteous?	1%	30%	69%	

(Note - only one call was put on hold and no calls were transferred.)

- How to register
- Where a practice advised they are accepting NHS patients the following information was provided:

Information about how to register	Number of Practices
Call in and complete form	22
Register over phone or call in	9
Make appointment for check up and complete forms at that time	5
Offered immediate appointment	3
Come in for assessment to validate eligibility to be NHS patient	2

- Did the practice provide correct information about NHS charges?

Of the 41 practices currently accepting NHS patients, 36 (88%) stated the basic NHS charges correctly when asked and 5 advised that NHS charging bands apply.

- Did the practice advise if charges are different for people receiving benefits/income support?

39 practices advised charges are different, 2 practices were unsure.

- The following additional advice was provided:

Advice	Number of Practices providing advice
Treatment is free if patient receiving benefits - need to bring evidence	16
Treatment is free	14
Treatment is free if on income support but patient may have to pay something if benefit is contribution based	5
Treatment is free but if the patient is in the process of being assessed for benefits they may have to pay but come in and discuss	1
Dentist will give advice about charges at appointment	1
Not sure but willing to find out	1

- If the practice advised they are not currently accepting NHS patients, did they know when they would be?

Advice	Number of Practices
Don't know	9
In a month or so	7
No funding currently to take on new NHS patients	3
Spring 2015	1
List closed for 7 years	1
List full, not taking on in near future	1
Not authorised for NHS patients	1
Only taking on patients exempt from charges	1
Will re-assess list in April 2015	1

- What additional advice/guidance did the practice provide to help “shopper” find a dentist accepting NHS patients?

Advice	Number of Practices
Try NHS 111	13
Suggested 1 other practice	7
Try NHS Choices	6
Ring round	5
Look on internet	3
Suggested 2 other practices	3
Suggested 3 other practices and try NHS Choices	1
Suggested 1 other practice and try NHS Choices	1
Suggested 2 other practices and try NHS 111	1
Suggested 1 other practice and try NHS 111	1
Gave number of local practice	1
Try Yellow Pages	1
Try CAB	1

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE MYSTERY SHOPPING EXERCISE

- The majority of practices responded to our mystery shopper calls with friendliness, courtesy and an overall high level of professionalism.
- Just over half (53%) of practices were accepting new NHS patients, half of those in the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation, with only 19 practices accepting new patients in the greater Dorset County Council area. This could potentially be an issue for people living in more rural areas and needing to travel further afield to access dental treatment.
- Of the 41 practices accepting new NHS patients there was some variation in the advice given regarding how to register.
- The majority (88%) of practices accepting new patients correctly advised callers of the basic NHS charging bands, the remaining 12% advising that “NHS charging bands apply”. (It should be noted that our research does not provide evidence of actual charges patients have been asked to pay and did not look at whether practices are clearly displaying charges in practice premises.)
- Set against this, feedback received directly from patients and the public suggests some people may be paying for treatment unnecessarily, as detailed in Section 3 above.
- All except 2 practices correctly advised callers that patients receiving certain benefits/income support are entitled to free/reduced cost treatment.

- Again, direct feedback from patients, as detailed in Section 3 above, suggests that sometimes they are unclear about the charges they should pay, especially those on low income or forms of income support.
- Many practices provided further help signposting callers to sources of information and help finding an NHS dentist accepting new patients. 34% suggest NHS 111 and 18% NHS Choices. There is some confusion on whether the NHS 111 service should be used for non-urgent signposting/advice. The NHS Choices website, under “How to find an NHS dentist” advises “To find an NHS dentist you can call NHS 111” however the same website under information about NHS 111 states “You should use the NHS 111 service if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not a life-threatening situation”.

## 5. WEBSITE REVIEW

A review of the NHS Choices website and all dental practice websites in Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth was undertaken to ascertain the following: Is information provided about whether the practice is accepting new NHS patients? Does the information on the practice website match the information provided on NHS Choices? Does the practice website provide information about NHS charges? Does the practice website provide information about how to make a complaint?

### FINDINGS OF THE WEBSITE REVIEW

We reviewed 98 websites (leaving aside the 6 specialisms and the 1 closed practice).

Note - websites were not found for 29 practices (30%).

- Summary - only 16 websites provide any information as to whether NHS patients are currently being accepted or not.

- Does the practice website advise if the practice is currently accepting new NHS patients?

Information Provided	No. Practices
No information	21
Private practices only (but no information advising of fact)	16
No information but advised phoning surgery	15
Yes practice is currently accepting NHS patients	7
Advised not accepting NHS patients at current time	3
Private but accepting NHS children and/or exempt patients only	2
No information but provided online form	1
Advised only accepting private patients	1
Advised NHS list currently closed	1
Advised accepting NHS under 18 years only	1
Advised accepting NHS patients but only limited numbers	1

- Where a practice has a website in place and information is provided about whether they are accepting NHS patients - does that information, the information on NHS Choices and also that provided verbally by the practice all match?

Yes	No
11	5

Where answer is No:

Practice site states	NHS Choices states	Verbal information from practice states
Accepting private only	Accepting NHS patients	Accepting NHS patients
Accepting limited number of NHS patients	Accepting NHS patients	Not accepting NHS patients at the moment
Accepting NHS patients	Not accepting NHS patients	Accepting NHS patients
Accepting NHS patients	No data	Accepting NHS patients
Not accepting NHS patients	No data	Accepting NHS patients

- Where there is no practice website or the site has no information, does the information on NHS Choices and that provided by the practice verbally match?

Yes	No
38	15

Where answer is No:

NHS Choices states	Verbal information from practice states	Number of practices
Accepting NHS patients	Not accepting NHS patients at the moment	6
Not accepting NHS patients	Accepting NHS patients	3

No data on NHS Choices for 4 practices

No response from 2 practices

- Do practice websites have information about NHS charges? (Private only practices are excluded in these figures).

Yes	No	No but signposts to NHS Choices
25	23	2

- Do practice websites have information about how to make a complaint?  
(Private only practices are excluded in these figures)

No information	Very basic e.g. contact practice	Some information but out of date e.g. refers to PCT	Comprehensive information
30	14	2	3

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE WEBSITE REVIEW

- 30% of practices do not have individual websites providing information for patients and potential patients. This would seem a high percentage. Only 16 practices provided information on their site about whether they were accepting NHS patients. However, 25 practices did have information about NHS charges.
- There is some discrepancy between information provided on practice websites compared to that provided on NHS Choices and compared to that provided verbally by practices. This leads to confusion and frustration on behalf of patients (and potential patients) trying to access accurate and current information.
- Only 3 practices provided any useful information on their website about how patients can make a complaint. Every patient has the fundamental right to complain if they are not happy with the care or treatment they have received from an NHS service and information should be readily and easily accessible about how they can do so.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Information should be made available by practices to patients and the public across different media - on paper, online (including website and social media accounts, if the practice has them) and over the telephone.

6.2 The information made available by practices to patients and the public should be consistent across all media.

6.3 Information should be checked regularly to ensure that it is comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date and includes information about whether the practice is currently accepting new NHS patients.

6.4 Practices should be aware of, and able to signpost to, other sources of information for patients and the public (e.g. NHS Choices website).

6.5 All practices should ensure that their information on NHS Choices is accurate and regularly updated.

6.6 Accurate information about “out of hours” and emergency dental services should be readily available both through practices and NHS 111.

6.7 All patients should be made aware of the charges before treatment begins and those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits should be advised about their options before treatment begins, to ensure that patients do not pay more than they need to. We draw practices’ attention to the work undertaken by Which? in their “Clean Up Dental Costs” campaign (see References for link).

6.8 Comprehensive information about how to raise a concern or make a complaint should be readily available, both in hard copy on practice premises and online. On websites this information should preferably be on a single page with an obvious Home page link.

6.9 Practices should make readily available information about how they have collected patients' feedback on their services, how they have responded to it and what changes have been made as a result.



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### Dental Project - Volunteer Briefing

To ascertain the issues people face when trying to access information about NHS dentists:

The project aims to:

- Identify how easy it is to find information about which dentists are taking on NHS patients at any given time.
- Identify if dental charges are made clear to patients (whether information is clear at practices, when given verbally or on websites)

1. **Mystery Shopping phone calls.** Each volunteer will be asked to call practices and “score” them using the template provided.

**Volunteer Briefing:** We would like you to behave as a “normal” patient who is asking for information about registering with the Practice and about dental charges. We would like you to ask the appropriate questions in your own words, in a way which is comfortable and natural to you, but will enable us to gain consistent feedback from all our volunteers. To this end we do not want to give you a formal “script” as this will appear false but the scorecard template provides some guidance. Note - If the Practice advise they are NOT taking on new NHS patients it’s unlikely that you will be able to ask about charges.

If, at any time, you feel under pressure or are uncomfortable with how the call is progressing please do feel free to politely end the call. Please do note why you wished to end the call - whether it was something that happened or was said to you or whether you did not feel sufficiently prepared/trained. Your thoughts on this second issue will help us in the future with any support and guidance we need to provide volunteers.

Each call should not last more than around  $\frac{3}{4}$  minutes. We do not want you to get into any in-depth conversations with staff. Please do not feel you have to make up a story, just advise that at this moment in time you are merely making enquiries about availability of NHS places. Staff should not pressurize you for further details, if they do, please make a note of what was said.

There is no “right or wrong” way to undertake this work so please don’t worry about saying exactly the same thing in the same words for each call. As long as you are asking for the same information that’s fine. Please fill in your scorecard as quickly as you can whilst things are still fresh in your memory. You do not have to note what staff said to you word for word (unless of course you feel it necessary to do so).

If you need any support before, during or after your involvement please do contact Chris Wakefield, Volunteer Officer or Annie Dimmick, Research Officer.

## Questions

2. Ask if the practice is taking on NHS patients.
3. If the answer is No:
  - Ask them if they know when they would be likely to be taking on new patients
  - Do they know if other local practices are taking on new patients
  - Did they signpost you to other sources of advice to find out nearest practice taking on new patients
4. If they say Yes to taking on new patients:
  - Ask them how you can register
  - Ask about dental charges (see Notes at end for information about charges)
  - Ask if charges are different for people on benefits (see Notes at end for guidance on who is eligible for reduced or free dental care) - you could say you have recently been assessed for

Employment Support Allowance for example - if they do query you further and you are unsure how to answer - just advise you don't know as you have only just been assessed.

That's all we need you to ask. As soon as possible please complete the "Scorecard" for each call. There's some additional space at the end if you feel you want to add anything further.

**Dental Mystery Shopping - Scorecard**

Volunteer Name.....

<b>Practice Name</b>		
<b>Date &amp; Time of call</b>		
<b>Availability of NHS places</b>		
<b>Scoring - Enter '0' for Didn't meet expectations. Enter '1' for Met expectations. Enter '2' for Excellent service. Leave blank for those that do not apply.</b>		
<b>Greeting &amp; Welcome</b>	<b>Score</b>	
Was the phone answered promptly - within 8 rings		
Did the practice identified themselves		
Did they answer with a professional tone		
Was the call well paced - not rushed		

Did they thank you at the end of the call	
<b>Customer Service</b>	<b>Score</b>
Did they understand what you wanted	
Did they ask you, if needed, to clarify your questions	
Did the practice demonstrate willingness to help	
<b>Practice Knowledge</b>	<b>Score</b>
Did they explain costs of NHS treatment	
Did they explain costs of NHS treatment for people on benefits or signpost you to the right information	
Did they give any other options and/or solutions? If so please state:	
<b>Overall Professionalism</b>	<b>Score</b>
Were they friendly	
Were they courteous	
<b>If put on Hold</b>	<b>Score</b>
Did they ask your permission to place you on hold	
Did they give a reason for putting you on hold	
Did they keep you on hold no longer than 2 minutes	
Were you thanked for waiting	
<b>If Transferred</b>	<b>Score</b>
Did they tell you that you were being transferred	

Were you given a reason for being transferred	
Were you given the name and number of the person you were being transferred to	
<b>Category Statistics (Office Use)</b>	

**Additional Comments:**

**Notes:**

**Dental Charges:**

There are three NHS charge bands:

- Band 1: £18.50 covers an examination, diagnosis and advice. If necessary, it also includes x-rays, a scale and polish and planning for further treatment.
- Band 2: £50.50 covers all treatment covered by Band 1, plus additional treatment, such as fillings, root canal treatment and removing teeth (extractions).
- Band 3: £219 covers all treatment covered by Bands 1 and 2, plus more complex procedures, such as crowns, dentures and bridges.

### **If you need further treatment**

If, within two months of completing a course of treatment, you need more treatment from the same charge band or a lower one - such as another filling - you don't have to pay anything extra.

However, after two months of completing a course of treatment, you will have to pay the NHS charge Band (listed above) for any dental treatment received.

### **Emergency or urgent treatment**

If you require urgent care, you will only need to pay one Band 1 charge of £18.50. Most urgent treatments can be done in one appointment. However, if more than one visit is required and you return to the same dentist to complete your urgent treatment, the Band 1 urgent charge is all that you should pay.

Once your urgent course of treatment is complete, you may be advised to make another appointment for a separate course of non-urgent treatment. In this case, the relevant Band charge will apply.

### **When you don't have to pay**

You don't have to pay a dental charge:

- for denture repairs
- to have stitches removed
- if your dentist has to stop blood loss
- if your dentist only has to write out a prescription - however, if you pay for prescriptions, you'll have to pay the usual prescription charge of £8.05 when you collect your medicine(s)

## **Personal dental treatment plan**

Your dentist should give you a personal treatment plan before you have Band 2 or 3 treatment. The plan gives details of the treatment and the amount you'll have to pay. You'll be asked to read and sign the plan.

If you've discussed having private treatment with your dentist, the details and costs of this treatment will be listed separately on your treatment plan.

Before having dental treatment, talk to your dentist about the benefits and any risks involved.

## **Paying for treatment**

Your dentist is entitled to ask for your payment at any stage of your treatment. As payment policies vary between practices, ask your dentist about when you will have to pay.

## **Referral to another dentist**

If you're referred to another dentist to complete your treatment, you will still only pay one Band charge. You will pay the full amount to the dentist who refers you.

If you're referred to a private dentist (and you accept this option) you will:

- pay the appropriate NHS Band charge to the dentist who referred you, and
- pay a fee for the dental work carried out by the private dentist you are referred to

### **Who is eligible for free or reduced dental charges:**

You do not have to pay for NHS dental treatment if, when the treatment starts, you are:

- aged under 18
- under 19 and receiving full-time education
- pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months
- staying in an NHS hospital and your treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist
- an NHS hospital dental service outpatient (however, you may have to pay for your dentures or bridges).

You do not have to pay if, during the course of treatment, you or your partner, receive:

- Income Support
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit guarantee credit
- [Universal Credit](#)

or

- you are named on a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate or you are entitled to an NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- you are named on a valid HC2 certificate

**For more in-depth information please see the NHS Choices website**

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1781.aspx?CategoryID=74>

**The Distribution List for this Report includes:**

- Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth Dental Practices
- Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group
- Dorset Health & Well-Being Board
- Bournemouth & Poole Health & Well-Being Board
- Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole Health Scrutiny Committees
- CQC (Care Quality Commission)
- Healthwatch England
- NHS England Wessex
- Dorset, Poole & Bournemouth NHS Foundation Trusts
- Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust
- Citizens Advice in Dorset
- Dorset Race Equality Council
- Dorset Community Action
- Bournemouth Council for Voluntary Service
- Poole Council for Voluntary Service

Other formats are available upon request.

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