



## Summary of Insight on Dentistry Services Prepared for NHS England as part of Community and High Street Dentistry Recommissioning Work

November 2018

NHS England is looking at re-commissioning high street and specialist community dental services.

The specialist services are commissioned to support people, who might struggle to access a high street dentist, which may be for a variety of reasons. Also, emergency out of hours dental services are commissioned, which provide dental care when examinations and treatment is urgently needed, and when high street services are closed.

To inform the commissioning process, NHS England is working with national organisations to understand peoples' needs and experiences of using such services. Regionally, the commissioning team are keen to understand what works and does not work for people and what needs to change.

We have shared a written briefing with NHS England's regional team, that has **over 50 anonymised experiences** our residents shared with us about **Dental Services** between **May 2017 - October 2018**.

We gather feedback about a wide range of health and social care services. Each year, we receive thousands of comments from members of the public. These come through various sources including our website, telephone Helpdesk, through engagement activities and our volunteers; as well as through our partnerships with the community and voluntary sector.

Our briefing was not intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of dental services and we asked for it to be viewed as supplementary to other evidence.

Rather than viewing patient stories as isolated cases which require investigation, we encourage stakeholders to consider them as indicators of how and where things might be done differently. They are not given as criticism but as a positive opportunity to hear; understand and respond to the public voice.

## What people told us about their experiences?

### These are the themes

- Some people spoke positively about their dental experiences and we were particularly pleased to be able to share some examples of what works well for younger patients, e.g.:
  - Staff that are friendly and kind makes a difference - ‘grumpy reception staff’ have a noticeably negative effect on young patients
  - Dentists who ask about the patient’s general health and check on medication gives reassurance to patients. In contrast, not giving time to get to know patients and to introduce their style/approach, creates anxiety and fear particularly in older patients
  - Taking the time to explain what they will/are doing and using numbing cream helps to reduce anxiety

*I went to the dentist with my Mum and I was very nervous. The dentist was really lovely and said that she would check my Mum's teeth first and that I could assist her and watch. She looked into my Mum's mouth and used a tool to get some really stuck food out of her teeth, but it didn't hurt because she put some numbing cream on her gum first. It was good to see. I wasn't so scared when it was my turn because the dentist was so nice and caring.*

*(11-year old's experience.)*

- Several people had experienced issues with faulty equipment leading, and/or injuries in their mouths, resulting from their treatment. Most reported a lack of care in the communication after these incidents.

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*Where people experienced poor care, we have suggested taking specialist advice from the [Oral Health Foundation](#) (01788 546 365). Also, our [Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service](#) offers information, so individuals can consider their options and next steps.*

*Linked to poor care, is the way complaints have been handled and particularly if a dentist is self-employed or ‘rents-a-chair’. This is something we would **recommend** NHS England considers when recommissioning services.*

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- Several people raised concerns over charging, and others had received fines for claiming free NHS dental treatment, which they had been led to believe they were eligible for, due to the benefits they received due to their disabilities.
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*Whilst the NHS England Dental Charging poster clearly sets out the basis for charging, there is another band charging page which gives more specifics. However, it can still be confusing for people when treatments and costs are not explained clearly before a procedure starts. There is also a two-month window in which treatment should be completed and it is at the dentist's discretion, if they extend this period, if treatment was delayed.*

*We would **recommend** NHS England look at how the communication of charges, prior to treatment starts, is improved through the recommissioning process.*

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- Being de-registered without warning, and having appointments cancelled at short notice, has created problems for some residents.
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*This is a particular issue for people living with mental health conditions and is something High Street dental services should be required to consider when trying to manage demand for their services.*

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- Several people have found it difficult to find an NHS dental service after moving to West Sussex, despite using NHS website information. Our local team has been able to provide more up-to-date information on which one are taking on new patients.
- Local people told us that high street NHS dental services are not available in Arundel, Petworth and Selsey.
- Poor experiences, at a dental practice, were escalated to NHS England so multiple concerns could be looked investigated further.