

Healthwatch Kent - January 2016
The Tooth be Told
NHS Dentists in Tunbridge Wells



Foreward from our Chief Executive

We have been hearing from people all over Kent about their issues with NHS dental services. These issues ranged from access to a dentist, confusion about the costs and exemptions and feedback about the treatment they received.

We had so many calls that we decided to investigate further so we could truly understand the issues and explore how we could help.

What becomes apparent very quickly is that NHS dentistry is not simple! It is a complex system with national rules and regulations so it is no wonder people call us with questions. There is little up to date, accurate information available to people about how and where they can see an NHS dentist. If a patient has issues outside of regular hours then it's even more complicated. Add to that the concerns of patients who are either nervous of a dentist or have serious dental issues then it is understandable that patients are concerned. We've now created two new leaflets to help people find an NHS dentist and another to explain the costs and exemptions.

This report summarises everything we have heard from patients and dentists and outlines a huge list of actions that we have recommended. Our work doesn't stop there as we have committed to supporting much of the work we have outlined. Some of our recommendations are for change at a national level and we are working with our colleagues at Healthwatch England to influence those changes. So this is very much work in progress and will take time for people to feel the benefits.

We've worked with the Local Dental Practice Network throughout this project and will continue to do so. We have also shared our findings with NHS England who commission and oversee NHS dental services across the UK.

If you would like more information, or would like to get involved then do please contact us on info@healthwatchkent.co.uk or call anytime on 0808 801 0102

Steve Inett

Chief Executive, Healthwatch Kent



Contents

Executive Summary	04
What did people tell us?	05
What have we recommended? from the Dental Local Professional Network (DLPN)	06 Response 07
Healthwatch Kent	08



Executive Summary

Our Aim

We wanted to truly understand the issues that affect patients and dentists. There are too many dentists for us to speak to across the whole of Kent so we picked Tunbridge Wells as data suggested it was one of the worst places in the UK for NHS dental provision.

Overview: 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

What did we recommend?:

- 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: We have created two new leaflets to help the public better understand dental prices and how to find an NHS dentist.
- 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 Practices and commissioners should 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 people living in care homes should be addressed
- 8 Better information about accessible dentistry must be made available especially for people in care homes or those unable to travel to a dentist.





What did people tell us?



How did we go about it?

In total we spoke to 44 people at the following locations

- Dental Practices
- Community groups including elderly and young parents
- Care Homes

We also worked with

- All 15 Dental Practices in Tunbridge Wells
- Kent Dental Helpline
- Kent Dental Local Professional Network
- The Chief Dental Officer at NHS England who commission dental services plus the Kent dental team

“My dentist is the ‘perfect dentist’... provided you can pay.”; “I would prefer to have an NHS dentist”; “We stayed when they went private; we used to be NHS”; “We trust them so we pay”

“I know that I need some work doing, but I’m holding off at the moment. It’s a trade-off”; “Some of our residents struggle to pay. Yes, they probably restrict their use” (About private dentistry)

“It’s too much when you don’t know it’s coming. I could do it if I could pay in instalments.” (NHS)

“I’ll find a new one (dentist) through word of mouth, I don’t know where to look. I’m aiming to go to Crowborough but at the moment, I have nerve pain from a replaced crown. It wakes me up every night so I’m using Corsadyl.”; “Google then phone around. You have to phone quite a few.”

“It is very difficult to find provision locally”; “Our residents find it easier to get private dentists”

“You have to find a dentist first. I tried several practices for my daughter who had a problem. Then I still had to wait a week. By then, the root canal was infected.”

“My grand-daughter was a carer when she lived here. Even though she has fragile teeth due to the medication she took for her health condition, she couldn’t afford private dentistry on her salary and couldn’t get an NHS dentist.”

“I couldn’t find an NHS dentist, so I decided to go (private and go) rarely... I budget in advance”

“Clear information on display”; “My dentist always explains”; “not sure about what would happen then... if I had to have two fillings at the same time. Is that one cost or two?”

“I’ve got a filling and it’s very sensitive so I’ve been back four or five times. They said that I might need a crown but they are not giving the treatment and I’m in pain... if they refuse again next time I will ask why it is they won’t do anything. I haven’t asked directly before.”

“No idea about how to raise questions about treatment charges (or dentistry in general)”; “I wouldn’t challenge the charge, no”; “I would probably just not go back if there was a problem”



What have we recommended?



We have made detailed lengthy recommendations. Here is a summary of some of the key points. If you would like more information do get in touch.

Patient Needs & Commissioning

- Patient feedback should be regularly collected and used when decisions are made about dental services
- Public Health to develop the mechanism to collect this from all parts of our community, especially the following:
 - Deprived areas
 - People without a dentist
 - Frail and elderly people
 - People with complex dental issues
- All dentists to clearly display Healthwatch Kent information so patients can easily give feedback on their experience
- Commissioners to use information from patients to improve access to NHS dentist
- Healthwatch England working with Chief Dental Officer at NHS England to address inequalities as part of the dental contract reforms

Frail & elderly patients

- Communicate better with care homes and elderly people about the services available to them
- Listen to the needs of elderly patients and care homes
- Ensure all relevant organisations are working better together (including Kent County Council, Kent Integrated Care Alliance, University of Kent, NHS England, DLPN & Public Health)
- Ensure patients with reduced mobility can still access the dentist

Information

- Urgently improve the accuracy of information especially NHS Choices and Kent Dental Helpline
- Improve the communication of dental information to all parts of our communities especially those most in need
- This information must be available in community settings not just in the dental practices
- We have created two new leaflets to help people understand how to access an NHS dentist and to understand the charges

Treatment costs

- We support the British Dental Association's call for action to simplify the way patients have to prove their exemptions from paying
- NHS England should consider payment plans for people who are not exempt but who find it difficult to pay for treatment in a lump sum
- Explore how best to support patients who are regulating their own treatment due to their concerns about paying
- Better information and communication for patients around the cost of treatment in a easy to understand way. This must be available in community places not just in the dental practices



Response from the Dental Local Professional Network (DLPN)



Kent dentists welcome this report from Healthwatch Kent and it highlights some of the issues that the profession itself has raised about information on access to dentistry, the type of dentistry available and the dental contract.

The recent visit by the Chief Dental Officer from NHS England made her views known that dental care should not be seen in isolation from general health and we as a profession and other healthcare professionals and patients have a role to play in preventing dental disease in the first place.

The DLPN will continue to work alongside Healthwatch Kent in improving services and ensuring patients' views are heard.

Dr Mark Johnstone,
Interim Chair of Kent DLPN

Since the publication of this report Healthwatch Kent has been working in conjunction with NHS England and the DLPN to address many of the issues we raised in this report. This work is ongoing.



Healthwatch Kent

Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Kent.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our FREE Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Kent's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on 0808 801 0102 or email info@healthwatchkent.co.uk



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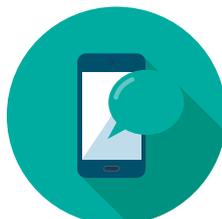


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Healthwatch Kent, Seabrooke House,
Church Rd, Ashford TN23 1RD



Face to Face:

Call 0808 801 01 02 to arrange a visit



By Text:

Text us on **07525 861 639**.
By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face.



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