



Report to Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee

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Title: Access to NHS Dental services in Buckinghamshire

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Recommendations/Outcomes:

1. Background

NHS England and NHS Improvement commissions dental services from primary, community and secondary care providers. The primary and community services are commissioned via contracts which fall within the NHS (General/Personal) Dental Services Regulations 2005. Secondary care (hospital) providers deliver services under NHS standard contracts.

NHS Patient Charge Regulations apply to the contracts falling within the 2005 Regulations, but not services provided under NHS standard contracts.

Providers of NHS primary care services are independent contractors, which means they provide services via contracts with the NHS rather than employment. Some provide services to all groups of patients, but some are for children and charge exempt patients only. Patients can attend whichever practice they wish.

Patients are not registered with practices but are encouraged to attend at regular intervals with the regularity of attendance based upon their assessed oral health. In the Thames Valley area (Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) about 1.1m people (52% of the population) attend an NHS Dentist on a regular basis (attendance within a 2-year period).

Providers of Orthodontic services are ‘primary care’ providers but provide treatment on referral for children. The community and hospital services provide treatment on referral. The Community Dental Service is for patients who have additional needs which makes treatment in a primary care setting difficult. The hospital services are more specialist in nature delivering Oral

and Maxillofacial, Orthodontic and Restorative services. In addition to this there are primary care based (tier 2) Oral Surgery (more complex extractions) and Restorative (Root canal, treatment of gum disease and dentures) services in Buckinghamshire designed to provide less complex treatments in a non-hospital setting. The tier 2 service provider hold what is known as 'advanced mandatory' contracts.

The tables below detail NHS Dental services in Buckinghamshire

Primary Care:

GDS contracts	
Full NHS	43
Child/ exempts only	23
Child only	5
Sum	71
Orthodontic contracts	6

Other services:

Service	Provider
Community Dental Services	Central and North-West London NHS Foundation Trust
Hospital services	Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Milton Keynes NHS Foundation Trust
Tier 2 Oral Surgery	Rodericks
Tier 2 Restorative	Dr A Rai

The attached information circulated to stakeholders in early February about the current situation re NHS access. These reports for the Integrated Care Systems (ICS) to provide an understanding of the current provision of dental services in each ICS. This includes information about provision in the Buckinghamshire. The reports are attached.

2. Main content of report

In the period between 25th March and 8th June 2020, dental practices (NHS and private) were required to close for face to face treatments. This was due to safety concerns for patients and staff due to the limited supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at the time, with the corresponding need that priority was given to hospital services. It was also recognised that changes that would be needed to the physical environment of practices to enable safe treatment. The PPE situation has since been addressed and the environmental arrangements remain in place.

Access to face to face care was provided via Urgent Dental Care (UDC) hubs. In the period March – June 2020 there were 2 hubs in Buckinghamshire – Eastgate Dental Centre and the Buckinghamshire Community Dental Service (provided by the Central and North-West London NHS Foundation Trust). The Community Dental Service was for more vulnerable and shielded patients. In the period between April and June 2020 there were 643 referrals to the Eastgate Dental Centre and 165 to the Buckinghamshire Community Dental Service. Further hubs were opened during the summer of 2020. There are now 4 UDC hubs in Buckinghamshire, but the number of referrals to them has fallen significantly in recent months. This is because General Dental Practices were allowed to open again, on a phased basis, from early June.

Due to the on-going safety requirements, the level of patient throughput that can be achieved is much reduced so, in line with the national Standard Operating Procedure, practices have focussed on patients with an urgent dental need, with on-going health needs and in courses of treatment.

There have been expressions of concern about access to NHS Dentistry over the period since the pandemic commenced. This has included reports from a number of Healthwatch organisations across the South-East. The Buckingham Healthwatch carried out a review of General Dental Practice websites.

Each concern has been followed up with the practices concerned and there have also been on-going communications with practices about wider concerns. Two newsletters issued to General Dental Practices are attached. In these issues, guidance was provided to GDPs about information to include on their practice websites and about key requirements as set out in the national dental Standard Operating Procedure.

In the period since 1st January 2021, primary care providers have been asked to achieve a targeted level of activity in the period to 31st March 2021. This is significantly below the targets required in normal years (for the safety reasons stated above) but has helped to open up the dental system in the period since then. The practices are still required to work within the national Standard

Operating Procedure. National discussions about the contract post April 2021 are on-going.

Due to the way in which demand has presented differently to different practices, some practices have been able to more quickly to opening for routine appointments than others. Patients can receive more information about this from their dental practice

One of the patient groups that has faced particular access challenges since last March is patients who have not attended a dentist on a regular basis. The Region has recently approved a number of practice applications to provide additional sessions to enable access for these patients. There are 6 practices delivering these services in Buckinghamshire.

Another key challenge has been access to referral services. The increase in hospital waiting times has been reported nationally. This is impacting on hospital dental services in this area and the Berkshire West, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care System (ICS) is running on several workstreams to address the backlog, including use Independent Sector hospitals. As with primary care services priority is for the more clinically urgent cases to be seen more quickly. All hospital services are using the Royal College of Surgeons' prioritisation guidance to inform this process

Non-hospital dental services do not fall within this programme so NHSE/I (South-East) is leading a Restoration and Recovery programme to attempt, over time, to address this issue. At the moment services such Community Dental Services and tier 2 Oral Surgery and Restorative services are having to focus on the most urgent patients. The improved situation re PPE and recent guidance about infection control arrangements have helped to improve the situation, but patient throughput remains significantly below normal levels.

The Local Dental Committee perspective is described below:

As dentists we have always wanted to provide services to our patients and continued to do this throughout the pandemic. Even after we were required to close in March 2020, we continued to provide telephone and video consultations and have been seeing patients at the practices since June when we reopened. As PPE has become more readily available, we have performed more and more treatments safely with the highest level of PPE being used, as well as slots for vulnerable patients. We have also historically prioritised emergencies of all sorts, whether regular attenders or not.

However, the challenges we face are that it has been a long time since we have been able to see children and routine adults. This needs to be done to ensure we are screening for cancer and that there isn't a serious deterioration in children's oral health now they are at home, not having their usual routine.

As such, with a backlog of patients and longer appointments required to ensure safe practice, we are trying our hardest to see as many patients as

possible. Whilst most practices are now offering routine appointments for patients for examinations, this results in it being harder to book in emergencies. Many practices in Buckinghamshire have responded by offering increased hours during which urgent appointments for patients who do not attend the Dentist regularly can be seen, and most importantly, stabilised medium term until they can find a regular dentist. It's not ideal but we are doing whatever we can to keep the service running fully and comprehensively, albeit more slowly due to increased ventilation requirements following aerosol generating procedures.

The hardest group to reach however are older patients, especially in care homes. With the high levels of PPE that dentists are used to wearing now, there may be an opportunity to help this group of patients who have little access historically, and with flexible commissioning available there is a framework to explore this further to address patients in pain who are unable to attend the dental surgery through any of the other options available.

Long term, we are hoping that with the comprehensive vaccination programme, we will be able to return to normal appointment times and expect to clear our backlog over the year.

3. Next steps and review

3.1 Access to services:

Ensure access can be achieved for patients who attend the Dentist on regular basis and those who do not via:

- Service provision in line with the national Standard Operating Procedure
- Increased face to face provision in the period January – March 2021 (national decision to be made re provision from April 2021)
- Maintain Urgent Dental Care hubs
- Maintain access sessions for irregular attenders
- NHS Restoration and Recovery programme to address backlog of patients awaiting treatment following referral

3.2. Information about services

- Continue stakeholder communications vis NHS England and NHS Improvement and Dental services
- Receive and follow up on feedback re access to treatment