
Appendix E - Healthwatch: Barnet – Report of Access to Dental Services Refresh January 2016 – Initial Findings

NHS England comments on the results following mystery shopping undertaken by Healthwatch Barnet in January 2016:

36% (19 practices) said they could not currently offer adults an NHS appointment.

25% (13 practices) could not currently offer children an NHS appointment.

The majority of practices who were able to offer appointments for NHS treatment could do so within 2 weeks, and many before this. 5 practices told us that they have used up their full allocation of NHS appointments for this year and they may be able to offer an appointment in March/April when they received their new allowance. 4 practices told us they would accept patients who were in receipt of benefits, but not NHS patients not on benefits.

As previously advised, NHS England, London Region need to understand who the specific providers are in order to take any proper action or provide a substantive response to the findings.

It is important that Barnet Healthwatch understand the response provided by NHS England in August 2015 and not misinterpret or misrepresent the explanations to the issues presented simplistically by stating that London Region view is that access is not an issue.

NHS England has tried to explain that access to NHS dental services are affected by variable factors at any given time and at any given practice. NHS dental providers vary in size, contract value and what they are contracted to deliver – eg Cavendish House Dental Surgery has a very small contract and only provides a service for children and non-fee paying patients (this is not encouraged or the norm, but based on historical provision and there are very few contracts like this). As such they are required to manage their contract throughout the year accordingly and some manage better than others.

In managing their contracted activity, there may well be times during the year where providers are unable to see new patients and as such are required to signpost patients to other providers of NHS dental services either via NHS 111, the NHS England contact centre or other practices in the area. It should be noted that there is no formal registration process for access to NHS dental services at this point in time.

There may well be practices that are experiencing increase in demand for services for various reasons, be it health needs, socio-economic factors, changes to demographics etc however, before further investments can be made, these services need to be reviewed in line with an oral health needs assessment.

It would be reasonable to say that if this type of survey were undertaken in any other part of London, a similar outcome would be expected in that some practices may not be able to offer NHS dental services at any given time, but importantly should be signposting appropriately.

Generally speaking, uptake is more of an issue in London rather than access. NHS England has undertaken oral health promotion work in Barnet recently whereby our teams had set up stalls in the main shopping areas and promoting NHS dentistry.

The Barnet Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8th February 2016 will be attended by NHS England representatives who would be happy to answer any further questions that either the Local Authority or Healthwatch Barnet has.