

Healthwatch Blackpool

Dentist Consultation, August 2015

www.healthwatchblackpool.co.uk



Introduction - Why did we do this?

People all across the country are venting increasing frustration about access to and the quality of NHS dentistry services. Healthwatch England has highlighted issues with people being able to access NHS dentists (in some areas just 1 in 5 surgeries are accepting new NHS patients). Significant numbers of patients are struggling to find an NHS dentist for routine NHS treatment, but are consistently being given misleading information about the availability of NHS dentists by local services and NHS Choices, leaving them confused and frustrated (HW England, 2014). There are reports of patients being deregistered / struck off books without notice and emerging concerns of dentists providing poorer quality services on the NHS and insisting on private treatments.



Healthwatch Blackpool ran a consultation during May-June 2015 to find out the views of local people with regard to what is and what isn't working well in Blackpool. **60 people highlighted concerns with dentists** which included difficulties in finding a dentist, issues with cost and difficulties in getting an appointment. Healthwatch Blackpool have previously conducted a Dentistry survey (March 2014) and had made recommendations that there should be more awareness of availability of NHS dentists as people had reported they found it difficult to find a dentist locally.

Our aim:

To evaluate people's views on the quality and accessibility of local dental services

What we did:

We developed a set of questions to collect the views and experiences of dental service users. We published our on-line survey on 1st August which was promoted on our website, through social media and into local community groups. All local Dentist surgeries were emailed to inform them of the survey and were invited to work with Healthwatch to promote it and collect the views of their patients but as of **31st of August 2015** none had responded to our request.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to views collected over the specific dates 1st - 31st August 2015. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experience of *all* members of the community just the sample who completed our survey.

Dental Services Consultation

Everyone should be able to access good-quality NHS dental services. There is no need to register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP because you are not bound to a catchment area (www.nhs.uk). All you need to do is to find a dental practice that's convenient for you, whether it's near your home or work, and phone them to see if any appointments are available. However, if the dentist's quota for NHS patients has been reached by the time you contact the practice you may not be offered an NHS appointment. In that case you can either choose to be seen privately, join a waiting list or look for a different dentist who is taking on new NHS patients.

If you do not have a regular dental practice you can search for one on-line through NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Dentist/LocationSearch/3> or you can telephone the Dental Access Service on 01253 655200 who will help you to register with a dentist and provide urgent dental treatment where it is needed.

On 28th September 2015 we used NHS choices to see which of the 16 dentists in Blackpool were accepting new patients. Although **5** were advertising that they were accepting new patients we found after contacting them via telephone that there were **no places available**.

On 29th September 2015 we contacted the Dental Access Service and we were told that there is a 12 - 18 month wait. They have no control over the dentists, they take a waiting list and dentists contact them if they can take a new patient. They advised us to call around dentists ourselves.

We received **100 responses** to our survey, of these **11 people were not currently registered with a dentist**, with 5 people reporting that they had tried to get a dentist but had been told there were no places available. 1 person was on a waiting list for a dentist of their choice, 1 person didn't know how to get a dentist and 2 people said they couldn't afford the private dentist they had been offered.

"I waited for a dentist was given an emergency dentist in Bispham if I needed a tooth pulling but never received a regular dentist. I was waiting for over 2 years in the end I pulled my own tooth as the wait for the emergency dentist was over 4 weeks and with a broken tooth I was in absolute agony I first registered to get a dentist in 2011 I am still waiting now"

"I am lucky to have been with my dentist for 30 years, my husband could not get on as NHS as it was full and consequently has to pay privately at great expense and therefore only attends in an emergency"

We wanted to find out the reasons people chose their practice

45% chose a dentist close to their home

27% chose a dentist that had been recommended to them

20% didn't get a choice, they just had to take what was available.

"They were accepting patients and were relatively close"

"I was assigned [my dentist] by the NHS. I was dismissed from my practice for missing an appointment I never had. I tried to get another through the Dental Access Team but when I chased it up 6 months later they said they had no record of me requesting a new dentist. I went back to my previous dentist who agreed they should never have removed me in the first place but had no NHS capacity left so I would have to go private"

"I was unable to find a dentist in my area and was put on a register. 18 months later I still had not heard from the register and as it had been over 2 years since I had my last check-up was becoming concerned. My sister spoke to her dentist and explained the situation and he invited me to join his practice at Whitegate Drive. I have now been there 8 years and I am very pleased. Although it does take 2 buses to get to the practice, it is only twice a year that I need to attend and I am willing to put up with this inconvenience."

We wanted to know how easy it is to get an appointment

83% of our respondents reported that they can **always/often** get a routine appointment that is convenient to them and **54%** reported that they can **always/often** get an emergency appointment when it is needed (30% had never needed an emergency appointment).

58% reported that they were extremely or very satisfied with the time they have to wait for an appointment.

"I went into my surgery in agony. They made an appointment for me a week later and told me to take painkillers in the meantime."

"I haven't needed an emergency appointment since I joined Ivory but I am confident in their service I would get one. I did get an emergency appointment at Whitegate Drive medical centre when I needed one, prior to joining Ivory."

"I have even had an emergency appointment on boxing day"

Dental Charges

We wanted to know if the cost of treatment was prohibitive in accessing appropriate dental treatment.

- 26% of our respondents are private patients and **pay in full** for their dental care.
- 48% of our respondent are NHS patients and **pay NHS** costs for treatment
- 26% of our respondents are NHS patients eligible for **FREE** dental care

Has the cost of treatment ever prevented you from having *routine* work done?

Band 1 treatment - £18.80 (NHS) covers an examination, diagnosis (including X-rays), and advice on how to prevent future problems, a scale and polish if clinically needed and preventative care. **Private treatment costs vary**

"I had to be prepared to go into debt because I care about my oral health."

Yes - 7% **No - 76%** Sometimes - 15%

Has the cost of treatment ever prevented you from having *essential* work done?

Band 2 treatment - £51.30 (NHS) covers everything in Band 1 plus treatment such as root canal work, fillings and extractions. **Private treatment costs vary**

"You really have no choice in this, dental pain can be very intense"

Band 3 treatment - £222.50 (NHS) covers everything in Band 1 & 2 plus crowns, dentures, bridges and other laboratory work. **Private treatment costs vary**

Yes - 10% **No - 86%** Sometimes - 5%

We were pleased to find that the majority of people (79%) reported that dental costs and treatment options were **always/mostly** explained to them before work was carried out.

However, whilst most people told us that the **cost did not stop them from having dental work done**, 30% felt that dental costs were too expensive. Almost half (46%) of our respondents were expected to pay separately for a hygienist.

"It's a shame that dentistry is no longer free in the UK, but the price is not too bad, unless you need non-essential work such as a bonded tooth to fill a gap which can cost up to £250 (or £1000 for the best quality option). I know it might be "non-essential", but it does affect my confidence and amount that I smile."

"Check-ups are fine but any other work is VERY expensive"

"For more serious work, allow time to talk through the options. I felt rushed and I wasn't given any information except for a list of costs. I understand that dentistry is stretched, and I don't blame individual dentists or practices for that. However, the length of time I have had to wait for treatment is far too long."

"My dentist used to be NHS and I like to stay with the same dentist as I have been with him for 40+ years. Unfortunately the cost is getting too much, last week it cost me over £80 for a filling and I am on a pension."

We wanted to know how well people were treated by their practice

People were **very happy** with the way they were treated with a large majority (**93%**) telling us they were treated with respect and dignity during their visit to the dentist.

22% of our respondents told us they have mobility issues or physical needs. **100%** of those told us their physical needs were accommodated and feel like the dentist provides the best treatment possible. Several told us their dentist has **ground floor** access.

“Total respect. They know me very well in there.”

“My Dentist is the best I've ever had. She listens, is friendly, caring, very knowledgeable, and always has time to ask how I am. She's the BEST!”

“Exceptional treatment and service every time.”

“I have arthritis everywhere & need a head rest every visit otherwise I am in pain in my neck head shoulders & jaw.”

“They (the dentist) have wheelchair access ramp and ground floor surgery. It's really easy to visit”

Fear and anxiety

Dental phobia can (according to various sources) affect up **to 75% of people**, we also asked how the dentist accommodated their fear and eased their anxiety.

32% of respondents told us they have fear or anxiety when visiting the dentist but almost all (**95%**) of those who do, told us they **feel safe** with their dentist, who explains and helps to alleviate their worries.

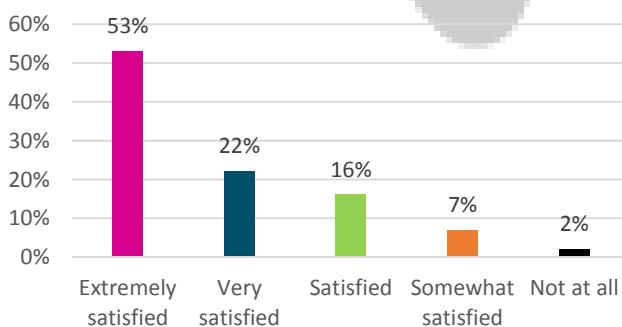
“I get anxious when they start, but then they tell me a couple of times what they are doing which helps me.”

“Ivory took time to ensure my comfort and explained everything in a reassuring manner.”

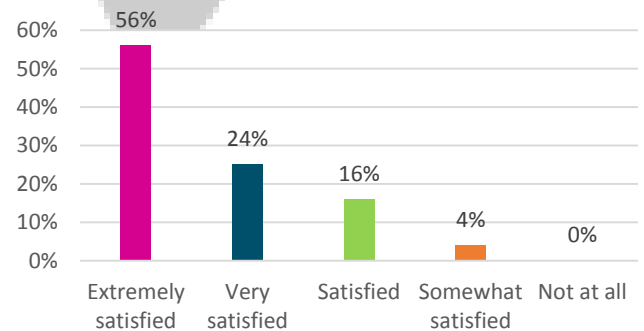
“I don't have any anxiety, however my eldest daughter does and they are fantastic with her”

Overall people are very happy with the service they receive with 90% saying that they would be happy to recommend their dentist to others.

How satisfied are you with the reception staff?



How satisfied are you with your Dentist?



“The staff are excellent, and very accommodating. It's not their fault that appointments have to be made over a month in advance, but they always apologise for the delay.”

“It's really hard to get through on the phone, sometimes you can try for days but the reception staff are fairly helpful when I do get through”

How can services be improved?

We asked respondent's how services could be used for them, they told us:

“Share good practice there is a patients participation group but is there one for dentists?”

“My dentist is great but it is getting too expensive to pay for private treatment so reluctantly I am looking for a new dentist”

“My dentist is great, so are the staff. The services are second to none!”

“By training more dentists at a local and national level. Start training children in oral cleanliness at early age. Train parents how to instruct their children in oral cleanliness.”

“More of them! My son is without a registered dentist and there are none available to get him into.”

Findings

1. Although NHS choices showed that **5** dentists were accepting new patients (September 2015), there were **no NHS placements available** when we contacted the dental surgeries directly.
2. For those who are registered with a dentist, overall people are very happy with the service they receive with 90% saying that they would be happy to recommend their dentist to others.
3. Most people can get an appointment at their dentist at a time which is convenient for them, including emergency appointments.
4. 100% of people say they dentist accommodates their physical needs. Dentist also do a good job alleviating the fears and anxiety of patients.
5. The cost of treatment does not deter people from having routine or essential dental work carried out, even though a third feel the costs are too high.

Diversity & Ethnicity Data

Respondent's age range:

- Under 16 2%
- 16-18 0%
- 18-24 3%
- 25-34 22%
- 35-44 19%
- 45-54 19%
- 55-64 19%
- 65-74 9%
- 75+ 7%

Dentists registered at

- King street 11%
- My dentist 10%
- Orthoworld 4%
- Ivory Dental Care 15%
- K Nantheesan 6%
- Dental Access 2%
- Westcliffe Dental 8%
- Synergy Dental 8%
- Jim Benson 10%
- Oasis Dental 11%
- Genix Healthcare 0%
- Arena Dental 7%
- Bispham Dental 4%
- Moor Park Dental 2%
- JC Lord 0%
- Blackpool Primary (South shore) 2%

Gender:

- Male 41%
- Female 59%

Ethnic background

- White British 96%
- Mixed white and black 2%
- Prefer not to say 2%

(Total responses - 100 from 1st August - 31st August 2015)