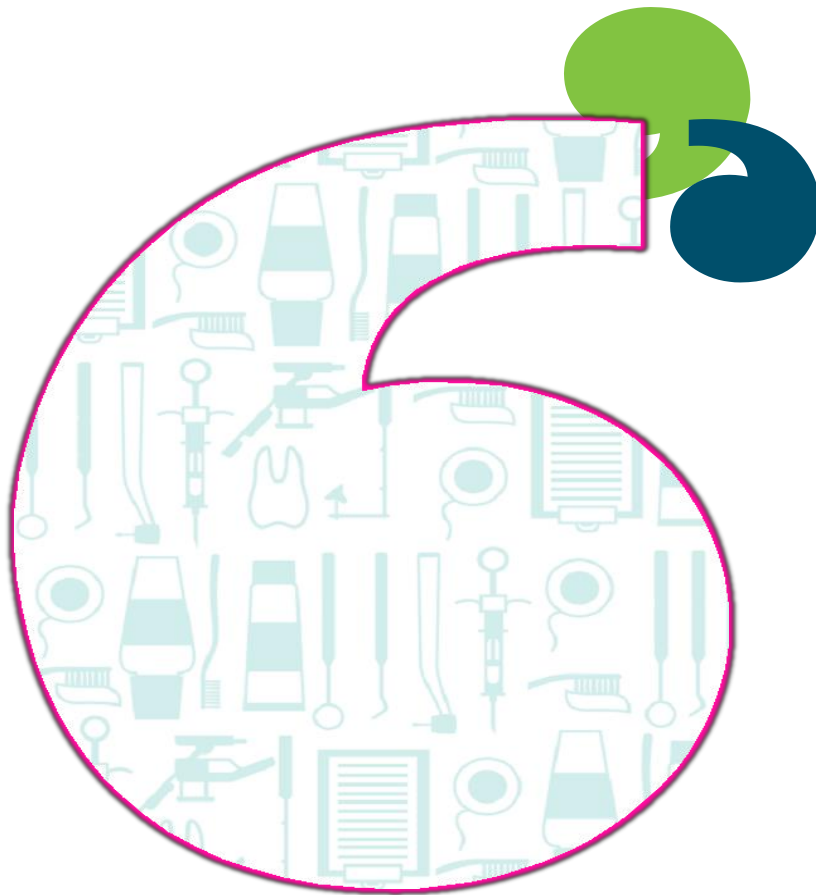


Access to NHS Dental Services in Hertfordshire Enter and View visit report



21 Dental

21 Russell Avenue, St Albans, AL3 5ES

St Albans and Harpenden Area

Premises visited: 21 Dental
Date and Time of Visit: 08.09.17 12:45
Visit Conducted By: Alice Lovell & Kumara-Moorthy

NHS Contract Holder: Mr BP Patel

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the staff we spoke to on the visit.

Purpose for the Visit:

Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HwH) is conducting an Enter and View visiting programme into Dental Practices in Hertfordshire following the outcomes of a joint project between HwH and Public Health locally. For further information our report can be found here:

<http://www.healthwatchhertfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Access-to-NHS-Dental-Services-in-Hertfordshire-2016.pdf>

The focus of the visits is to look at the:

- Environment
- Physical Access
- Information Access
- Equality and Diversity
- Complaints Handling

We are working with Public Health East of England and have informed NHS England locally. We are also working closely with the Central Region Inspection Manager - Dentistry at the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The Local Dental Committee has also been informed and has been very supportive of this work.

Methodology:

Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HwH) is the independent health and social care champion. Local Healthwatch is in place to gather the views and experiences of people accessing services, to use this information to influence decisions and to provide information and advice to the local community about health and social care services.

Legislation allows HwH authorised representatives to ‘Enter and View’ health and social care premises to see and hear for themselves how services are provided.

We are focussing on one area at a time that has been randomly selected. We began with Welwyn and Hatfield, where 50% of the practices were randomly selected for an Enter and View visit; the summary report of our findings for the district can be found [here](#). We are currently looking at St Albans and Harpenden, and have plans to visit 25% of the dental practices in the area.

These Enter and View visits are ‘announced/unannounced’ visits where we notify the practice of our intention to visit within the next 4 weeks but do not give a specific date or time. Authorised HwH representatives use an observational checklist to record their findings and have thirteen specific subject areas to ask the person on duty at the Reception desk about.

Desktop research is carried out on the website of the dental practice and the practice’s entry in NHS Choices.

Disclaimer

The report relates only to a specific visit (a point in time) and the report is not representative of all service users (only those who contributed within the restricted time available).

1. Introduction

21 Dental is a dental practice situated on a back street behind the shops on St Albans High Street. The practice has been in existence since 2005. Currently working there are four dentists, two dental nurses, and the receptionist.

Travel links are good as a result of the practice's proximity to St Albans High Street. A few minutes' walk away are buses to Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, and surrounding rural areas. A further few minutes' walk away are buses to more far out places such as Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, and Heathrow Airport. The taxi rank is also located on St Albans High Street, the same distance away.

2. Environment

2.1 Signage

The practice was easy to find as there is a large sign on the front, which can easily be seen from the road. 21 Dental does describe itself as a dental practice on the signage.

The practice does provide an embedded Google Map on their website for patients' convenience in the 'Contact Us' section.

2.2 Car Parking

Parking is available to patients for 1 hour on the street if they pay into the parking meter; otherwise a permit is needed, which may be given out by residents on the street, not the practice. There are also several paying car parks within short walking distance of the practice, such as Drovers Way car park, and Russell Avenue car park. The receptionist let us know that they would direct patients to either of those car parks mentioned above.

In terms of accessible parking, there are two spaces on the street, further down the road from the surgery. The receptionist told us that they would direct disabled patients who asked for an accessible space to these parking spaces.

2.3 Visible External Information

There is plenty of information visible to the outside of the practice. In the windows, visible to people walking by on the pavement, a sign says that NHS treatment is available at the practice, which includes the well-recognised NHS logo. There is also a sign to say that they are currently accepting new NHS patients, and that patients can call 111 for help out of hours.

2.4 First impressions

We were warmly welcomed to the practice by the receptionist. The reception and waiting room areas are combined into one room, which is tidy and spacious. There were approximately six removable chairs lined up against two walls, which were all the same height and material. There was a table in the corner of the room which had plenty of books and magazines for patients to read, although there was nothing to entertain children while they wait that we could see. However, there was a fish tank in the corner of the room to add a more homely feel to the waiting room. On the whole, although the practice itself was friendly and welcoming, the waiting room was in need of some care and attention in terms of the décor. We noticed particularly that there seemed to be old, brown tape covering a switch for the electric radiator. The room was also quite dominated by artificial light, which may make it a difficult environment for some service users.

The practice said that the blinds are open during the day which lets natural daylight in; the overhead lights are an adjunct. There is no old brown tape covering the switch for the electrical heater. It is a removable adhesive strip to ensure that the heater is not turned on until required.

There were several notices dotted around the room, as well as a noticeboard area next to the reception desk, which had information about the practice's services. The sizes of the font varied between notices, which could present a difficulty for visually impaired service users. There were no pictures of staff members at the practice. The Friends and Family Test was clearly displayed, though the questionnaires and the feedback box were out of the reach of wheelchair users quite high up.

3. Physical Access

3.1 Facilities

The practice is accessible via a well-signposted but narrow pathway down the side of the building, which is on street level. Wheelchair access is not ideal, as there are two right angle turns to get through the door of the practice, and very little room for manoeuvre inside. The lip of the front door makes it more troublesome for wheelchair users to enter the practice than to exit. Once inside the practice, there is a steep ramp up to the surgeries, making it hard for a self-propelled wheelchair user. However, service users in larger electric chairs would most likely not be able to enter the practice at all.

The practice said that the ramp is there to allow patients access to the surgeries.

The receptionist acknowledged that entry to the practice is problematic for wheelchair users. The receptionist said that if a person declared their disability to them over the phone, depending on what it is, they would either try to book them into the surgery that is slightly easier to access, or recommend another dentist surgery. They also mentioned that they might recommend the Special Care Dental Service provided by Hertfordshire Community Trust, which has a clinic in St Albans City Hospital, if appropriate.

The practice said that they do not ask patients with pushchairs to leave them outside.

There is no hearing loop for those with a hearing impairment.

The reception desk is not an obstacle for wheelchair users, as the desk is not a solid half-wall, but a panel of wood in front of the office. The receptionist must always stand when at the desk as well, so the desk is not a barrier to good communication.

The practice does not have an accessible toilet for those with a disability. The bathroom is too narrow to allow a wheelchair user, and does not appear to have any railings to help patients with mobility issues. The toilet facilities and the walls and floor did have a colour contrast, which will help to protect the dignity of those living with dementia, however, as stated above the décor could also use some care and attention. We did not see a red alarm cord in the bathroom.

4. Information Access

4.1 NHS Charges

The NHS Bandings for treatment costs were on display and up to date, clearly visible in the reception area. When asked about how the cost of treatment would be explained to patients, the receptionist pointed to the sign next to the desk with the NHS bandings. They also said that they use the FP17DC form, but tend not to use it when treatment has only been in Band 1. They said that service users would be given their own copy of the FP17DC form to take home, and that the dentist would explain the costs in the dentist surgery, rather than in open reception.

4.2 Complaints

The complaints procedure was not on display in the practice that we could see. When asked, the receptionist told us that they keep a copy of it in a folder on a shelf in the waiting room. When we asked if we could have a copy of the procedure, the receptionist gave us their Complaints Policy, which seemed not to be the same as what was in the folder. We were told a copy of the procedure could not be

provided. The receptionist said that if a patient voiced serious concerns about their treatment, they would ask the patient to follow the complaints procedure.

The practice said that the complaints procedure is visible and is part of the Quality Assurance Programme which is placed in a prominent area on the wall. A copy of the Complaints procedure could be provided if one is asked for as it can be photocopied immediately.

The Complaints Policy is succinct, and sets clear expectations for the service user of what they can expect from a complaint. The policy also reminds patients that they are likely to have a more accurate investigation into their complaint, the earlier the patient lets the practice know they have had a problem. The receptionist let us know that they would always steer a patient towards a verbal conversation in the surgery when dealing with complaints.

Summary of the Practice's Complaints Policy

Named Responsible person	Acknowledgement Of complaint	Clear timescales for complaint	Additional information about organisations to take complaint to?	Support for complaints? Pohwer or Healthwatch?
Yes	Yes - 2 working days	Yes - within 10 days.	No	No

However, the practice's Complaints Policy does not include any information about the escalation process, if a patient is unhappy with the way their complaint has been dealt with by the practice.

The practice said that the complaints policy is a comprehensive document and does have information about the escalation process since it also includes an information document from Healthwatch which does have this further information.

Neither the Complaints Policy or procedure appear on the practice's website.

4.3 Promoting oral health

At the time of our visit there was plenty of information on oral health for both adults and children on the walls in the waiting room and reception area.

4.4 Dental Practice and NHS Choices website

It was difficult to find Russell Avenue Dental Practice on NHS Choices, as the practice is listed as 'Patel Mr BP & Associate' on the website, which is not what the practice calls itself on its own website. The practice's entry on NHS Choices has not been updated since 2010; as such no information on the services provided here can be found due to the website's 90 day rule. Despite this, information about the practice's facilities appear still to be accurate.

The practice's own website is simple. Photos of the staff working at the practice is a nice touch to put patients at ease ahead of their appointments. The 'The Team' page on the website could be more clearly labelled as it includes information on the fees at the practice, as well as some other extra information. However, NHS fees are not published on the website, although the bandings are mentioned, and, as stated above, neither is the complaints policy. In addition to this, the practice's lunchtime closing hours are not written into their opening hours on the homepage.

5. Supporting Patients

5.1 Communication

When asked about how patients' communication needs are dealt with, the receptionist told us that their computer flags up any needs declared to them when a patient comes for their appointment. The receptionist also admitted that they may not always have the computer system up, so they have the needs written onto patients' paper records in an obvious place as well. It was not mentioned how often a patient's communication needs would be checked with the patient.

The practice said that the appointment diary and patient booking system is kept on the computer and therefore it must be turned on at the start of the day. The patients communication needs would be checked and noted with the patient and/or their confidential medical health form which is updated twice a year along with every time a patient attends for treatment.

When asked how the practice would deal with patients who cannot speak or understand English, the receptionist told us that they ask the patient to bring a friend or family member to interpret, but do allow for longer appointments in these cases. This is also true for patients with a hearing impairment, although the receptionist said they have used Type Talk before to communicate with patients. The receptionist commented that an interpreter service is hard to find.

In cases where patients would like to sit in a private room to recover from treatment or speak confidentially to a member of staff, the receptionist said they would try to move patients around to create space.

The practice added that for private matters the patient is allowed to discuss anything in the surgery and also they recover from treatment here until they themselves are ready to leave.

5.2 Patients with specific requirements

As stated above, the practice said it asks patients to bring family members or friends to help with specific requirements, such as those with a hearing impairment.

The receptionist said that for patients with a learning disability, special care is taken to ensure they understand what is happening. They are given longer appointments, and their Purple Folders are filled out with them.

In the case of patients with a visual impairment, the receptionist told us that they would be expecting them for an appointment, and be ready to help them in the door. They also said that they would guide the person to the handrail along the corridor in the practice, and help them into the treatment room if need be.

5.3 Medical Emergencies

The receptionist informed us that in the case of a medical emergency, the panic button behind the desk would be pushed, and the emergency services would be called. The two first aiders at the practice were identified on a poster beside the reception desk. However, the receptionist informed us that everyone working at the practice is annually trained in first aid. They also let us know that the medical emergency procedure is drilled every six months to ensure patient safety.

The practice has its own defibrillator, as well as an emergency trolley, both of which are kept in a cupboard in the surgery nearest the waiting room. When asked if it would ever be impossible to reach the equipment because of a surgery being carried out, the receptionist said that the cupboard is near the door so it would be easy to access no matter what was happening in the surgery.

6. Summary of Findings

21 Dental has many areas of good practice. We found the following areas to highlight:

1. Clear and useful signage on the exterior of the building.
2. Transparency around NHS Fees.
3. Promotion of oral health in the waiting room.
4. Approach to patients with a learning disability.

We also found the following areas for improvement:

1. Décor of the waiting room/reception area.
2. The Complaints Policy.

3. Practice NHS Choices website entry.
4. Accessibility for patients with physical disabilities.

7. Recommendations

1. Consider ways of decreasing the size of the lip on the front entrance to improve access for wheelchair users.
2. Consider ways of improving the appearance of the waiting room to ensure patients' comfort and ease.
3. Place some children's books and/or toys in the waiting room to cater to all patient ages.
4. Ensure that all notices in the waiting room are in a large typeface to try to make sure it is accessible to all patients.
5. Place the Friends and Family Test in a more accessible position in the waiting room.
6. Consider displaying images of practice staff on the wall of the waiting room/reception area.
7. Consider converting the patient toilet into an accessible toilet.
8. Install a red alarm cord in the toilet to ensure the safety of all patients using the practice.
9. Consider ways of improving access to the practice, for example replacing the entrance with a sliding door.
10. Consider installing a hearing loop.
11. Make the complaints procedure available for patients to take away, rather than keeping only one copy in a file in the waiting room.
12. Consider whether it will always be realistic for a complaint to be dealt with in ten days, and ensure this management of expectations is accounted for in the Complaints Policy.
13. Include an escalation procedure, enclosing details for NHS England, the Private Dental Complaints Service, and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.
14. Incorporate Healthwatch Hertfordshire and POhWER (a patient advocacy organisation) into the Complaints Policy, in accordance with the Regulation of Dental Services Programme Board.
15. Ensure that NHS Fees are displayed on the practice's website, as well as the practice's updated Complaints Policy incorporating the changes mentioned above.
16. Update the practice's entry on NHS Choices.
17. Include the practice's lunchtime in the opening hours on the website.
18. Ensure that the pages on the practice website are accurately titled to ensure patients' easy navigation of the information available.

19. *Ensure that patients' communications are checked regularly in order to meet the requirements of the Accessible Information Standard.*
20. *Consider ways of creating a private space for patients who would like a confidential conversation, or need to recover after treatment.*
21. *Consider how the practice can accommodate patients with specific needs who do not have family or friends to give assistance at appointments.*
22. *Ensure that there is always a designated first aider at any given time; this may be done by a rota system.*

Practice response:

1. Duly noted.
2. Duly noted.
3. Duly noted.
4. Duly noted.
5. It will now be placed on the table in the corner of the room.
6. Duly noted.
7. The practice is a Grade II listed building and building work of this type would not be feasible.
8. Duly noted.
9. Duly noted.
10. Duly noted.
11. Copies have been made and kept in the office.
12. We have decided to increase the timeframe after your suggestions and further consultation. There will be an initial response after 3 days and the complaint could preferably be resolved after 28 days. We will also keep the patient informed every 10 days as to the resolution process.
13. The Healthwatch leaflet has these details.
14. The POhWER leaflet has been added.
15. Duly noted.
16. It has been done.
17. Duly noted.

18. Duly noted.

19. Patients medical history forms are updated at least twice a year and checked on every visit for treatment with the dentist.

20. The practice is a Grade II listed building and building work of this type would not be feasible. Any private conversations/recovery after treatment can be in the surgery.

21. The team is always willing to help any patient. It is their first priority and they will offer assistance.

22. Duly noted.