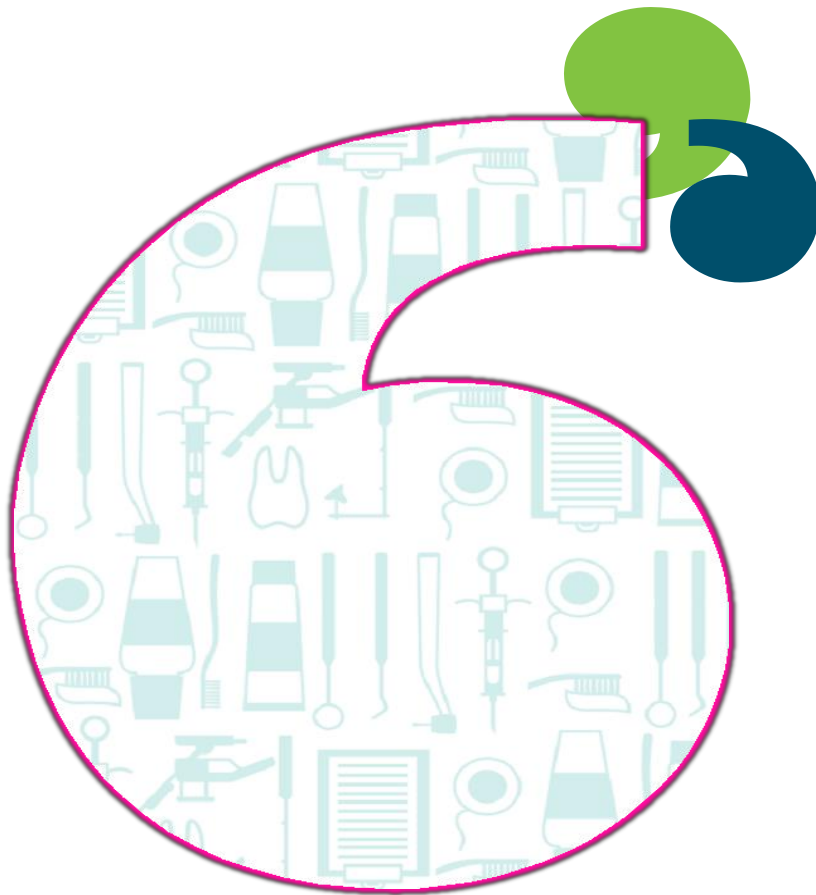


# Access to NHS Dental Services in Hertfordshire Enter and View visit report



**Russell Avenue Dental Practice and Implant Centre**

**11 Russell Avenue, St Albans, AL3 5ES**

**St Albans and Harpenden Area**

**Premises visited:** Russell Avenue Dental Practice and Implant Centre

**Date and Time of Visit:** 08.09.17 10:45

**Visit Conducted By:** Kumara-Moorthy & Alice Lovell

**NHS Contract Holder:** Dr G Dellow

### **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

*Russell Avenue Dental Practice and Implant Centre is situated on a back street behind the shops on St Albans High Street. It is immediately next door to Harvey House Doctors' Surgery. The practice has been running since 1986. Currently working there are five dentists, one hygienist, three dental nurses, one trainee dental nurse, a practice manager, two receptionists and an administrative assistant.*

*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 is easy to find due to the large metal plaque on the exterior of the building, easily readable from the street, although this would not be obvious to a car passing by. The plaque is traditional, and does not use the term 'dental practice', but calls it a 'dental surgery'. 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 on the street if they have a permit; visitor permits appeared to be showing on the dashboard of some cars, though it was unclear whether these were courtesy of the practice or not. 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 the 'NCP at the back of M&S', across the road from the practice.*

*In terms of accessible parking, there are two spaces on the street close by to the entrance for people with a disability. At the time of our visit, both of these were occupied. 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

*As stated above, the practice has a traditional silver plaque on the front. The sign lets patients know that NHS treatment is available, however there is no immediately recognisable NHS logo included. No information for 111 for out of*

hours help is displayed on the outside of the practice, however there is an emergency answerphone number given.

**The Practice clarified: The emergency number on the answerphone message is 03000333224 and takes you straight to 111.**

## 2.4 First impressions

*The receptionist and one of the dentists warmly welcomed us when we arrived. The reception area and waiting room is combined in one room that is light, clean and tidy and has space for approximately seven to ten people to sit in at once. There was only one type of chair, which was a row of cushioned benches around the edge of the room. There was a multitude of books and magazines on the side for adult patients to read, as well as a box of children's toys and a small selection of children's books under the table at the side, which was not as obvious as the adult books.*

*There was no noticeboard that we could see, except for a patient/dentist agreement about behaviour and a Quality Assurance Programme, which were both displayed in small print on the wall. There was a list of dentists practicing on the premises, but no photos to accompany them. There were a number of leaflets on the side for various treatments available at the practice. There was also a cardboard stand for the 111 service, though the feedback sheets for this were hidden away at the back of the stand.*

*The Friends and Family Test questionnaires were on a clipboard with a pen attached, sitting atop the feedback box. Other stands for leaflets were placed around the box, and on top of it, however, which made the test less obvious for patients to pick out.*

*The practice seemed to be offering small travel-size tubes of toothpaste for patients to take away for free, which is very good practice.*

## 3. Physical Access

### 3.1 Facilities

*The practice does have wheelchair access into the reception area/waiting room and into the downstairs surgery. However, it is difficult for a wheelchair user to get into the practice in the first place as the pathway up to the door is narrow and without turning space. In addition to this, there is a large lip on the door which is difficult for a wheelchair user to get over, except when propelling themselves backwards. At the time of our visit, there appeared to be no bell or way of calling*

*for assistance to enter the practice. A large wheelchair, or electric wheelchair would have difficulty in attending appointments at the practice.*

*When in the waiting room, there is little room for a wheelchair user to manoeuvre. As there are no removable chairs, there is very little space for other patients in the waiting room to share the space. The desk in the waiting room does not have a lowered section, which makes it difficult for the receptionist to speak to wheelchair users comfortably.*

*There is no hearing loop at the practice for the hard of hearing.*

*The patient toilet is on the downstairs level, however it is not an accessible toilet. It is too narrow for a wheelchair user to access, and there is no red alarm cord inside. There was also no colour contrast between the facilities in the toilet, and the colour of the walls or floor, which would help protect the dignity of patients living with dementia.*

## **4. Information Access**

### **4.1 NHS Charges**

*The NHS Bandings for treatment cost were on display and up to date, clearly visible in the reception area. The circumstances in which treatment is free on the NHS were displayed on another stand, beside the bandings.*

*When asked about how treatment costs are explained to patients, the receptionist told us that they would point out the bandings sign on the desk, as well as give them an NHS issued leaflet about costs. The leaflets were also up to date and on display in the practice.*

*When we asked about whether they use the NHS's FP17DC form to explain treatment plans to patients, the receptionist told us that the dentists use something similar but not the same form.*

### **4.2 Complaints**

*The practice's complaints policy was not on display in the reception area/waiting room, however when we asked how a patient would be made aware of the policy, the receptionist told us that they would provide a copy of the policy to a patient who asked.*

*The policy itself is clear and patient-centred, but there are a few points that need to be addressed.*

- 1. The small typeface makes it unsuitable for those with a visual impairment.*

2. Details for NHS England are given as the 'Primary Care Trust', for which the phone number is incorrect.
3. The address given for the Private Dental Complaints Service is out of date, while a premium rate number is given for the service when an 020 number can be found on the service's website.
4. NHS England and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman are presented as interchangeable, however patients must complain to NHS England before the Ombudsman will take up a complaint.
5. There is no parity between all the services given in terms of how they can be contacted, as some have phone numbers and others do not.

The policy cannot be found on the practice's website.

#### Summary of the Practice's Complaints Procedure

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 - 5 working days	Yes - within 25 days with further notification if required	Yes - PDCS* GDC HSO NHS England	No

\*PDCS Private Dental Complaints Service

GDC General Dental Council

HSO Health Service Ombudsman

### 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. For adults there were leaflets particularly on smokers' oral health.

### 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 'Moxom Mr RP & Associates', and there is a second dental practice existing on Russell Avenue. 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. Information on the practice's wheelchair accessibility still appears to be accurate, however they have listed as having no accessible parking, which we established is available.*

*The practice's own website is professional and clear. Photos of some of the staff working at the practice is a nice touch to put patients at ease ahead of their appointments. However, NHS fees are not published on the website, 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.*

**The Practice confirmed that the reception desk is usually open between 13.00 and 14.00**

## 5. Supporting Patients

### 5.1 Communication

*When asked about how the practice would deal with patients' communication needs, the receptionist told us that they have communication needs declared to them appearing on a flagging system on the computer patient records. Each symbol on the patient record has a different meaning that will be apparent to anyone viewing the records at the practice. The receptionist did not mention how often a patient's communication needs would be checked with the patient.*

*When asked how the practice would deal with patients who cannot speak or understand English, the receptionist told us that they have relied on family members and friends of the patient to interpret. They also told us that they have booked an interpreter for a patient once in the past, and so they are aware that this is a possibility. However, they do tend to rely on family and friends to ensure communication needs are met; this is the case for patients with a hearing or visual impairment, and those with a learning disability.*

*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 offered the garden room at the back of the practice. This is the staff area, which the receptionist said patients would be welcome to use if need be.*

### 5.2 Patients with specific requirements

*As stated above, the practice said it relies on the help of family members or friends to help patients with specific requirements, such as those with a hearing or visual impairment, as well as those with a learning disability. They are happy for patients to bring a chaperone.*

*When the receptionist was asked if they had heard of the Purple Folder for people with learning disabilities, they said they had not heard of it, but was keen to hear more about it.*



### 5.3 Medical Emergencies

*In the case of a medical emergency, the receptionist let us know that they would dial 999 while either of the principal dentists, who are first aid trained, tried to help the patient. The receptionist said that all staff are given annual training for life support, and so as such, everyone on site is able to use the practice's defibrillator. However, it was unclear if a written protocol for a medical emergency is in place at the practice.*

*The practice does have its own defibrillator and emergency trolley, which are placed next to the reception desk on the ground floor.*

## 6. Summary of Findings

*Russell Avenue Dental Practice and Implant Centre has many areas of good practice. One patient who spoke to us in the waiting room said that they had been coming to the practice for fifteen years, and were happy with the service they had received. We found these particular areas of good practice:*

- 1. Signposting of NHS treatment and fee bandings inside the practice.*
- 2. Promotion of oral health for both adults and children.*
- 3. Free toothpaste for patients.*
- 4. Friendly, welcoming staff.*

*However, we also found the following areas for improvement:*

- 1. Accessibility for wheelchair users to the practice.*
- 2. Accessibility for those with specific requirements.*
- 3. Complaints policy.*
- 4. Practice NHS Choices website entry.*

## 7. Recommendations

- 1. Improve signage to the practice so that it is clear to patients arriving on the road.*
- 2. Include the NHS logo and 111 for out of hours help on the sign outside, as well as replace 'St Albans area code' with the full phone number for ease of access for patients.*
- 3. Consider widening the walk up to the practice, and ways of decreasing the size of the lip on the front entrance to improve access for wheelchair users.*
- 4. Consider making a space in the waiting room for wheelchair users to improve the space available to all within the waiting room.*

5. Consider creating a section of the desk that would be wheelchair accessible to improve communication for all.
6. Make the feedback box for the Friends and Family test more prominent in the waiting room.
7. Ensure that all notices in the waiting room are in a large typeface to try to make sure it is accessible to all patients.
8. Create a colour contrast between the facilities and the walls and floors in the toilet to protect the dignity of patients living with dementia.
9. Install a red alarm cord in the toilet to ensure the safety of all patients using the practice.
10. Consider installing a hearing loop for the hearing impaired.
11. Update the complaints policy in accordance with the points in need of addressing discussed in section 4.2.
12. Incorporate Healthwatch Hertfordshire and POhWER (a patient advocacy organisation) into the complaints policy, in accordance with the Regulation of Dental Services Programme Board.
13. 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.
14. Update the practice's entry on NHS Choices.
15. Include the practice's lunchtime in the opening hours on the website - [see response in 4.4](#).
16. Ensure that patients' communications are checked regularly in order to meet the requirements of the Accessible Information Standard.
17. Ensure that all staff are familiar with Purple Folders.
18. Consider how the practice can accommodate patients with specific needs who do not have family or friends to give assistance at appointments.
19. Ensure that there is always a designated first aider at any given time; this may be done by a rota system.
20. Ensure that there is a clear written protocol for medical emergency situations.

### Practice response:

1. We are having a new sign made.
6. We have put the FFT box in a more prominent position.
11. We have updated the complaints policy.
12. We have added this information to the complaints policy.
14. We have updated our information on NHS choices.
17. All staff are now familiar with the purple folder.



All other points have been duly noted