

Dental Practices Review February 2019

Introduction

Healthwatch Newham conducted a service review of 29 dental practices across Newham in January 2017 and again in August 2017 to investigate the availability of routine NHS dentist appointments, following feedback that residents were finding difficult to secure an appointment. The research revealed that 65% of practices could not offer a routine NHS appointment for children or adults within two weeks¹. Due to continuing feedback, 18 months on in February 2019 Healthwatch Newham conducted a further research to re-evaluate the service.

Methodology

In 2017, NHS England supplied a list of 29 dental practices contracted to provide NHS dentistry services. Healthwatch Newham staff called the dental surgeries to ask a series of questions on the availability of NHS appointments and later visited the premises to find out about access and availability of information.

Dentist profile

- 29 dental practices on the NHS England list. Of which:
- 7 were excluded:
 - 2 provided an orthodontic and a sedation clinic service.
 - 2 provided private services only.
 - 3 were engaged or calls went to voice mail and therefore not contactable.
- 22 practices were available to contact.

Findings

Of the 22 practices contacted:

Open NHS Lists

- All took NHS appointments but 3 were oversubscribed and expected to re-open their NHS list in the autumn.
- Earliest appointment:
 - 5 could provide an NHS appointment within a week
 - 7 within 2 weeks (of these, 2 initially said they could provide an NHS appointment within a week, but when contacted again stated it would be within 2 to 3 weeks)
 - 6 within 4 to 5 weeks
 - 3 within 7 to 11 weeks.
- Registration requirements:
 - 10 practices required new patients to register with a form and NHS number
 - 8 had a form but did not ask for any identification
 - 2 required ID and proof of address
 - 2 did not provide the information as their list was closed.
- Urgent or emergency treatment:
 - 10 said no this was not available
 - 2 said yes, within the next day
 - 4 within a week
 - 2 did not provide the information as their list was closed.
- Referral for urgent or emergency treatment

¹ Visit our website for the full report: healthwatchnewham.co.uk/our-reports

- Of the 16 practices that had 2 or more weeks wait for a first appointment, none could refer the patient somewhere else for an emergency, 5 of these said to call 111. Only 1 said to call in the morning for an emergency appointment.
- NHS appointment prices:
 - 15 practices quoted NHS standard prices for NHS appointments. Of these 3 confirmed children under 18 go free and one quoted the price of an initial visit to be £35 instead of £21.60)
 - 14 practices stated that the NHS prices are per treatment and not per visit
 - 1 said the first appointment would be free
 - 1 required registration before disclosing the pricing
 - 5 did not provide the information as their lists were closed or they were not reachable.
- Most receptionists spoken to were friendly, helpful and accessible and only a couple felt unsure about the information they were giving.
- Access
 - 11 of the 22 practices were accessible for those with physical impairments, 3 partially and 7 not accessible as they had small doorways and stairs leading to the surgery.
 - 17 had clear or some pricing on display, while 4 did not.
 - 12 had at least some oral health promotion materials on display, while 9 did not.
 - 4 said they could provide translation services, while 2 stated that staff may be able to help with some languages.
 - We did not observe induction loop signage and the practices.

Conclusions

NHS England told Healthwatch Newham that dental practices should display and provide clear guidance on pricing and signpost to other dentists that may be able to provide appointments.

- While 86% of practices were taking new NHS patients, a significant proportion (45%) of Newham dentists contracted to provide NHS routine appointments had waiting times between 4 weeks to 3 months. Almost half of practices were not able to provide urgent or emergency treatment.
- 45% of practices required an NHS number to register new patients. Only 36% did not require any identification to register.
- There seems to be an endemic lack of information among practices in relation to availability of appointments at other practices and treatment alternatives, as none of the practices with 2 or more weeks wait were able to refer a patient elsewhere for urgent care. Only 5 referred to the 111 services.
- 67% of practices referred to the correct NHS pricing, most of whom referred us to the NHS website for further details, with only two practices saying a higher price and a second requiring patients to register first before confirming the price.
- 50% of practices surveyed were accessible for people with physical impairments, while 33% were totally inaccessible, with the remaining providing partial accessibility for patients.
- 40% of practices did not have oral health promotional materials on display or easily accessible to patients, in one case these were kept in the reception office on top of a cabinet. 20% did not have clear NHS pricing information on display.

Recommendations

- Practices should be enabled to provide clear and adequate information to patients on alternatives to access urgent care.

- Processes should be improved to ensure that all Newham dentists contracted to provide NHS routine appointments display and can provide fully and clear information on costs and prevention.
- Practices should not be asking patients for identification to register or to have treatment.