

Public experience of dental services during the coronavirus pandemic



August 2020



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Recommendations

1.1 Collaborate with other local dental care providers in order to be aware of and advise patients of alternative available services that are accepting new patient enrolments (NHS England and Improvement, 2019).

1.2 Develop virtual communication strategies to achieve a wider reach, and successfully inform patients of (1) new intakes at a dental care practice, (2) rationale for longer waiting lists and (3) patient urgency classification (The Kings Fund, 2016).

Background

Within Stoke-on-Trent there are more than fifty public dental services that provide appointments, treatments and consultations to a significant percentage of residents in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. However, following the coronavirus outbreak dental services were asked to substantially reduce the number of routine face to face dental care check-ups. Soon after, dental services were asked to cease all routine appointments and treatments to reduce the spread of coronavirus until advised otherwise. Consequently, patient access was largely limited to urgent treatment at local Urgent Dental Care Hubs for a number of weeks. Dental staff not only stepped forward to run these centres but also to support the NHS front line in other areas, for which participation should be widely acknowledged. Most Midlands practices continued to provide virtual or telephone consultations and prescriptions during the closure. Patients with an urgent dental problem and without a regular dentist were able to obtain advice and, where necessary, an emergency appointment by contacting the Dental Advice Line.

The Government gave the green light for dental practices to reopen in England from 8 June 2020, providing appropriate measures were in place and national guidelines were mirrored to ensure the safety of staff and patients. For example, changes were made before arrival, how you wait, the way dentists operate and when you leave.

Throughout this period of reduced dental care services, Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent received a growing number of wide-ranging questions, support and information requests and feedback of personal experiences. Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is the voice of local citizens and is well embedded in the community and monitors the standards of health and social care services, in order to produce reports and recommendations based upon public feedback.

Data Collection

A qualitative research design was formed to collect public feedback items. From 28 July 2020 to 14 August 2020 social media platforms and our website was utilised for a callout to residents of Stoke-on-Trent, for dental services experiences during the coronavirus pandemic. Targeted questions were distributed across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and website news articles to expand virtual reach.

Each virtual callout post addressed the followed questions:

- (1) Are you registered with a dentist or have you tried to register during the coronavirus pandemic?*
- (2) Have you visited a dentist during the coronavirus pandemic or rang for any support or guidance?*
- (3) How long did you wait for treatment or are you still waiting for treatment?*

Data Analysis

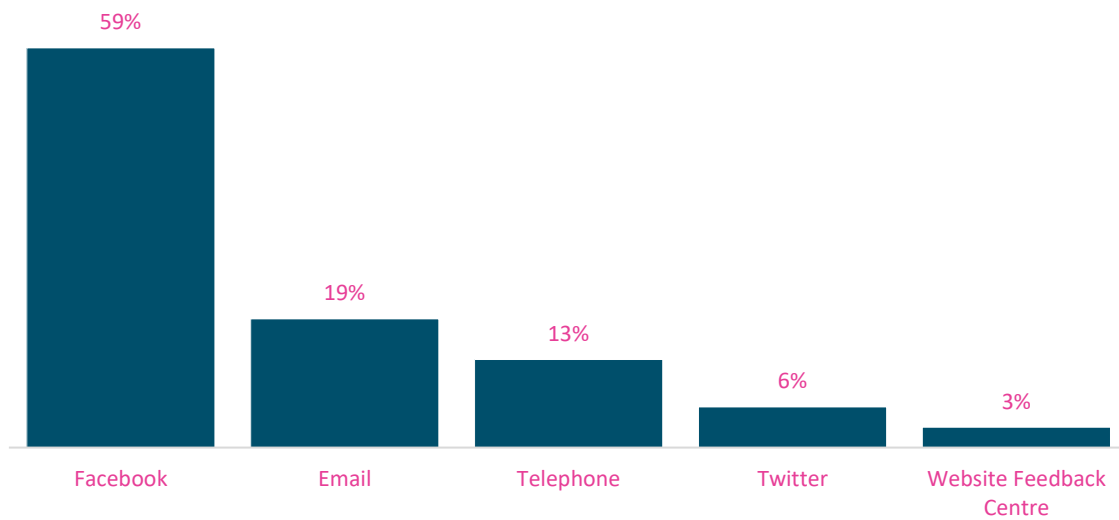
To analyse the feedback items, thematic analysis was implemented in the following steps. (1) Transcribe the 32 feedback items. (2) Transform into preliminary codes. (3) Produce lower order themes. (4) Conclude with three higher order themes to summarise all data materials. The trustworthiness of all data received from the 32 feedback items was considered by abiding to systematic reflection and reflective commentary to strengthen the credibility and transferability of each piece of feedback.

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is a part of Engaging Communities Staffordshire (ECS). ECS underpins its research activities by applying the Market Research Society Codes of Conduct, which allows it to demonstrate that it is credible, fair and transparent. ECS is a company partner and accredited by the Market Research Society. The team carefully consider all data requirements and the handling of data in relation to research. To further ensure the quality of the final report, an internal peer review process was initiated to ensure that the report is fit for purpose before submission.

Where data is not robust it has been statistically suppressed to prevent disclosure.

Total Responses

A total of 32 feedback items were received. Within the column chart and table below there is a breakdown of where each dental care feedback item was obtained from.



<u>Virtual Platform</u>	<u>Number of feedback items</u>
Website Feedback Centre	1
Telephone	4
Email	6
Facebook	19
Twitter	2
Total	32

Summary of Findings

The three overall higher order themes represent all of the 32 feedback items received. The three concluding themes are:

Treatment and Care

It is clear that the treatment and care provided was regarded as a positive experience. Likewise, staff performance was deemed as positive in accomplishment of creating a safe and engaging environment for all family members.

Access to Services

Patients appear to be less satisfied with accessing local dental care services. This was because of a lack of availability to register, speak with a member of staff in a realistic time frame or a lack of support in identifying available services to register with.

Information and Communication

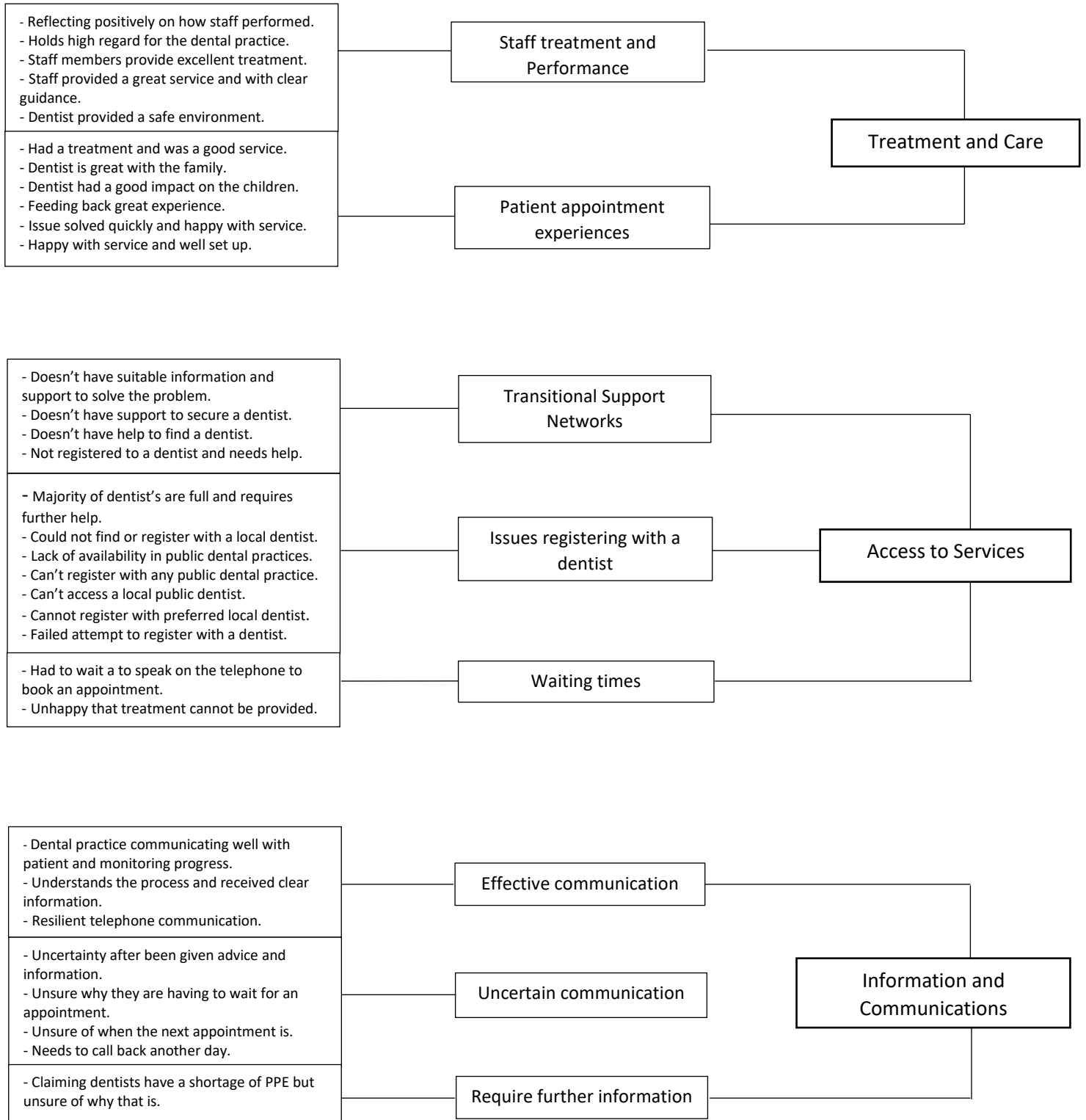
Patients shared mixed feedback with some sharing effective communication. Positive feedback shared indicated that services were communicating well and providing updating patients of next steps. However, others left uncertain. Some patients appeared unsure of when to rebook or arrange a new appointment for their previously cancelled appointment.

Summary of Findings

Preliminary Codes

Lower Order Themes

Higher Order Themes



Appendix 1 - Feedback Comments and Breakdown

Comments	Code	Lower Order Theme	Higher Order Theme
My dentist has been brilliant and got me in for a filling at earliest opportunity. I felt very safe. Rosslyn road dentists brilliant. (User 1)	Dentist provided a safe environment	Staff treatment and performance	Treatment and Care
Sneyd Green Dentist - My dentist rang me yesterday as I rang in June as my filling had come out. They asked if I have used a temporary filling and was I in any pain. I explained the temporary filling has been great and it has not come out and I am not in any pain. I was than informed to leave things how they are, and they will review this when I go for a check-up. I am really pleased that I heard from them now they are seeing patients. (User 2)	Dental practice communicating well with patient and monitoring progress	Effective communication	Information & Communication
Not registered with a dentist. Broke a tooth and nobody can seemingly help me. I was advised to try temporary filling. Did not work. (User 3)	Doesn't have suitable information and support to solve the problem	Transitional Support Networks	Access to services
I've visited the dentist twice during lockdown everything clearly explained to me full PPE worn very polite service. (User 4)	Reflecting positively on how staff performed	Staff treatment and performance	Treatment and Care
Hello, the thing is that I would need you to help me find some free dentist as almost every dentist told me that they do not have space. thank you Registered at Pall Mall Dental Practice in Hanley and have an appointment in a few weeks. (User 5)	Majority of dentist's are full and requires further help	Issues registering with a dentist	Access to services
Cannot find a dentist (User 6)	Could not find or register with a local dentist	Issues registering with a dentist	Access to services
A woman rang the office phone and asked are we the dentist as she wants to	Not registered to a dentist and needs help	Transitional support networks	Access to services

<p>make an urgent appointment as she needs a tooth out and she is not registered with a dentist.</p> <p>(User 7)</p>			
<p>Tunstall Primary Care Centre [Absolutely top-notch staff. I would love to be able to go there for all. My dental treatment Superb.]</p> <p>(User 8)</p>	<p>Hold high regard for the dental practice.</p>	<p>Staff treatment and performance</p>	<p>Treatment and Care</p>
<p>Ashlow Orthodontic Practice [Dr **** is one of the nicest orthodontists I have ever come across, he made my experience so comfortable and easy. I would definitely recommend to others (Ashlow Orthodontic Practice).]</p> <p>(User 9)</p>	<p>Staff members provided excellent treatment.</p>	<p>Staff treatment and performance</p>	<p>Treatment and Care</p>
<p>Hello, I am currently 19 years old and I am looking for a NHS dentist. Until now I had to pay for a private dentist services as I couldn't find an NHS dentist after COVID-19. I am from Stoke on Trent so if there would be at least small chance that you would help me I would be really grateful thank you.</p> <p>(User 10)</p>	<p>Lack of availability in public dental practices</p>	<p>Issues registering with a dentist</p>	<p>Access to services</p>
<p>I've just had a filling. Absolutely brilliant I go alchemy in Shelton. Wouldn't leave there for nothing.</p> <p>(User 11)</p>	<p>Had a treatment and was a good service</p>	<p>Patient appointment experiences</p>	<p>Treatment and Care</p>
<p>We have recently moved to the area and I am having no success at all in registering with an NHS dentist, have phoned in excess of 12 one accepting private one said try again towards the end of the year, my postcode is **** we have transport.</p> <p>(User 12)</p>	<p>Can't register with any public dental practice</p>	<p>Issues registering with a dentist</p>	<p>Access to services</p>
<p>Haven't got a dentist, no dentist are taking patients the dentistry system is rubbish.</p> <p>(User 13)</p>	<p>Can't access a local public dentist</p>	<p>Issues registering with a dentist</p>	<p>Access to services</p>
<p>I go to Dividy Road dentist and see someone called **** and he is great with the kids, and also having anxiety great with me also.</p> <p>(User 14)</p>	<p>Dentist is great with the family</p>	<p>Patient appointment experiences</p>	<p>Treatment and Care</p>

<p>**** at Dividy Road dentist is brilliant. My kids aren't anything like they used to be at the dentist since we have been seeing him.</p> <p>(User 15)</p>	Dentist had a good impact on the children	Patient appointment experiences	Treatment and Care
<p>My other half has been trying for past 3 days for an emergency dentist tried all the numbers suggested by NHS helpline either not answering or telling him to ring back in morning.</p> <p>(User 16)</p>	Needs to call back another day	Uncertain communication	Access to services
<p>I went to emergency dentist 26th March was told I needed root canal ASAP. I have a dentist but not been for 2 years so was told to try again at the end of April. Waited until the beginning of July when all the pubs opened to be told that because I haven't been for 2 years I would have to have a regular check-up first even though I have the paperwork from the emergency dentist and told them what I need and that they are taking emergencies only otherwise I would have to go back the emergency dentist tried calling but was always engaged. I'm just waiting until all this blows over because I know I won't be able to get in anywhere else. Ridiculous. I really don't want to lose any teeth.</p> <p>(User 17)</p>	Uncertainty after been given advice and information	Uncertain communication	Information and Communication
<p>**** at Dividy Road dentist, brilliant dentist.</p> <p>(User 18)</p>	Feeding back great experiences	Patient appointment experiences	Treatment and Care
<p>Had tooth ache for weeks been waiting for treatment. Not sure why dentists are not back to providing a normal service. Can you explain why the delay?</p> <p>(User 19)</p>	Unsure why they are having to wait for an appointment	Uncertain communication	Information and Communications
<p>Can you explain why dentists have a shortage of PPE? Readily available at distributor to order.</p> <p>(User 20)</p>	Claiming dentists have a shortage of PPE but unsure of why that is	Require further information	Information and Communications
<p>I have been trying to register with a dentist for 6 weeks having split a tooth. Have tried Smallthorne Dental Practice and My Dentist Sneyd Green.</p>	Cannot register with preferred local dentist	Issues registering with a dentist	Access to Services

<p>Neither will register me or even give me a date when I can be registered.</p> <p>Unfortunately, from my perspective, there is NO dental care available at the moment.</p> <p>(User 21)</p>			
<p>My husband had tried to register with 3 dentists since lock down restrictions eased and none so far are taking on new NHS patients.</p> <p>(User 22)</p>	Failed attempt to register with a dentist.	Issues registering with a dentist	Access to Services
<p>I had a check-up in March need a filling and tooth out so had an appointment beginning of April which was cancelled due to COVID-19 and was told that I am on the waiting list.</p> <p>(User 23)</p>	Understands the process and received clear information.	Effective communication	Information and Communications
<p>I rang the number LJ gave me about the emergency dentist and wanted to provide my feedback. I was kept on hold for 27mins but managed to get appointment at the dentist opposite the job centre in Hanley. Tooth extracted, best £22.70 I've spent in a long time, oh the joys of being toothache free. "Thank you for your help".</p> <p>(User 24)</p>	Resilient telephone communication	Effective communication	Information and Communications
<p>I had an abscess called the number given out by LJ and was given a appointment within an hour at Hanley health centre brilliant service.</p> <p>(User 25)</p>	Issue solved quickly and happy with service	Patient appointment experiences	Treatment and Care
<p>I went today and it was grand, super safe and really well prepared.</p> <p>(User 26)</p>	Happy with service and well set up	Patient appointment experiences	Treatment and Care
<p>A lady rang to say her dentist was closed and she needed treatment. Checked the dentist and found they are open, but callers can wait for up to 7-8 minutes. Range lady back and said - let it ring. She rang back 15 minutes later to say she had got an appointment and thanks.</p> <p>(User 27)</p>	Had to wait a to speak on the telephone to book an appointment	Waiting times	Access to Services

<p>My appointment for my check-up got cancelled. My dentist has not been in touch for months. Not sure they are still in business. I'm shielding till 1.9.20. So best lay off the sweets and keep good dental hygiene.</p> <p>(User 28)</p>	<p>Unsure of when the next appointment is</p>	<p>Uncertain communication</p>	<p>Information and Communications</p>
<p>My husband's filling fell out (approx 23 July) so he contacted the Smallthorne NHS practice which he is registered with. They told him that they are only dealing with priority issues, ie if there was pain etc and recommended that he go to boots and buy a temporary filling that he could fit himself. He did this, it stayed in for 2 days before falling out and when we re-read the instructions it said it was only for use up to 3 days! What does he do? Call the dentist and lie, saying he is in pain or continue with a big hole in his tooth which could cause further problems? I understand that they may not want to do general check-ups but should.</p> <p>(User 29)</p>	<p>Unhappy that treatment cannot be provided</p>	<p>Waiting times</p>	<p>Access to services</p>
<p>Lady rang - had toothache but no dentist and needed urgent treatment.</p> <p>(User 30)</p>	<p>Doesn't have support to secure a dentist</p>	<p>Transitional support networks</p>	<p>Access to Services</p>
<p>I was originally with an NHS dentist which I joined in Feb. My appt in April and June were cancelled so I decided to join a private practice in Birches Head.</p> <p>I went for an initial consultation in June and then 2 subsequent cleaning appts in July. Each time I felt so safe.</p> <p>You had to wait outside for your turn then when you were allowed in your temperature is taken. You are then asked to sanitise your hands. Once in the dentist room I had to wash my hands and use their mouth wash.</p> <p>At the end of my appointment I had to wash my hands again before leaving the room then sanitise my hands before leaving the building.</p> <p>(User 31)</p>	<p>Staff provided a great service and with clear guidance.</p>	<p>Staff treatment and performance</p>	<p>Treatment and Care</p>
<p>A lady rang the office and asked could we help as she has got receding gums which are painful, and she cannot find a dentist to register.</p> <p>(User 32)</p>	<p>Doesn't have help to find a dentist</p>	<p>Transitional support networks</p>	<p>Access to Services</p>

Appendix 2 - References

NHS England and Improvement (2019). Dental Record Keep Standards: a consensus approach. Retrieved from:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/dental-record-keeping-standards-a-consensus-approach.pdf>

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