



Tower Hamlets Dentists
June-December 2021

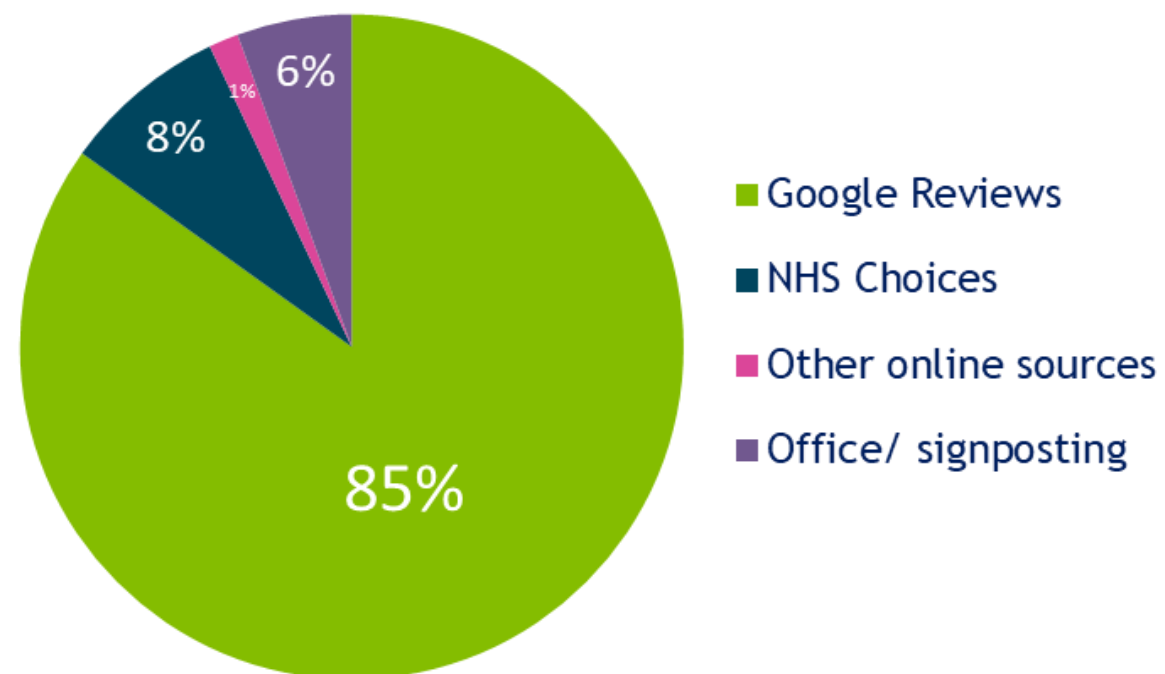




Primary care dentists in Tower Hamlets June-December 2021

We have analysed a total of 608 comments about dentists in Tower Hamlets, identifying 2,930 issues.

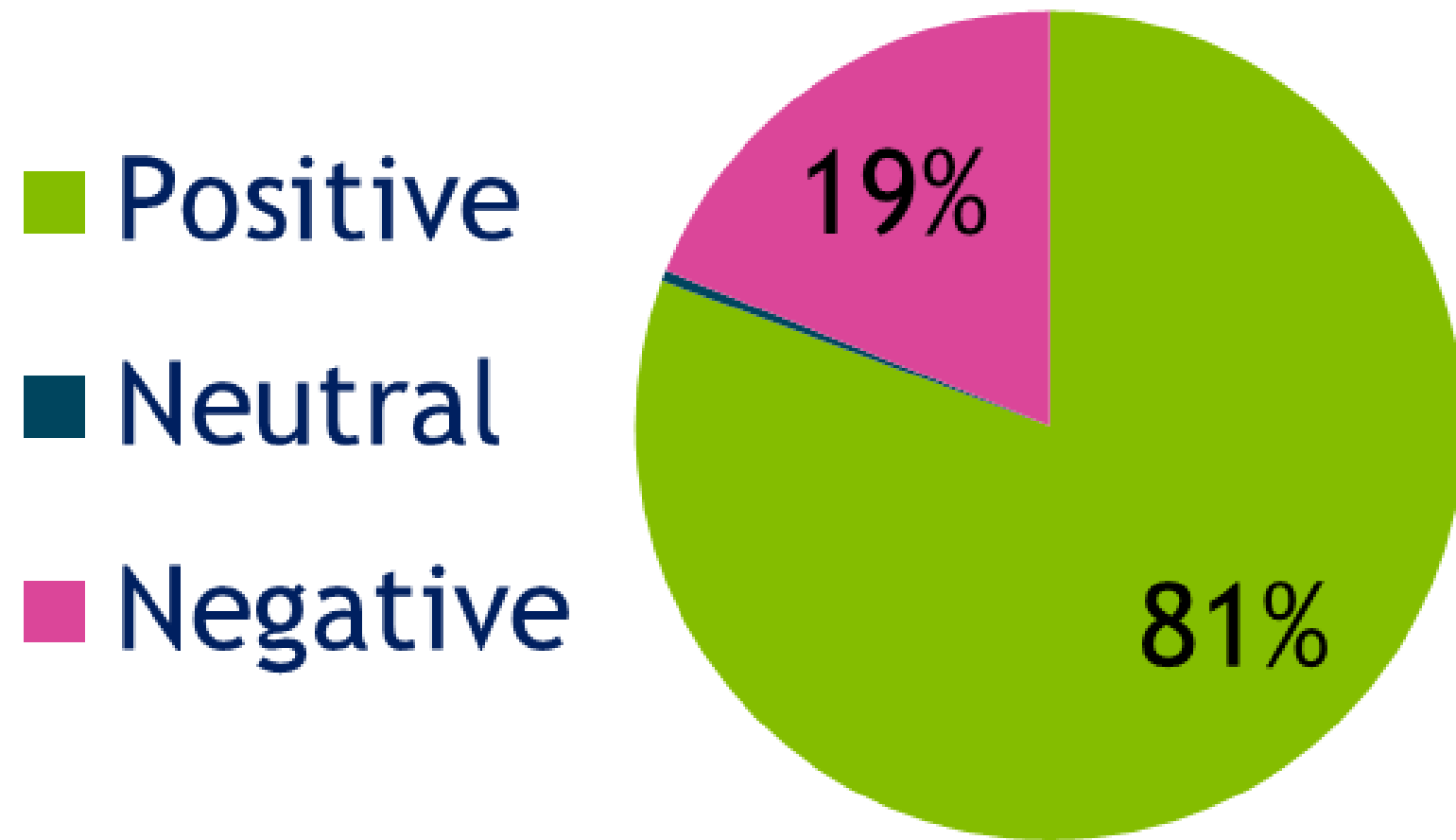
Most of the comments we analysed came from online reviews (primarily Google Reviews); 6% came from people who approached Healthwatch Tower Hamlets for advice; including those who were contacted us because they were unable to register with a dentist.



What we have learned:

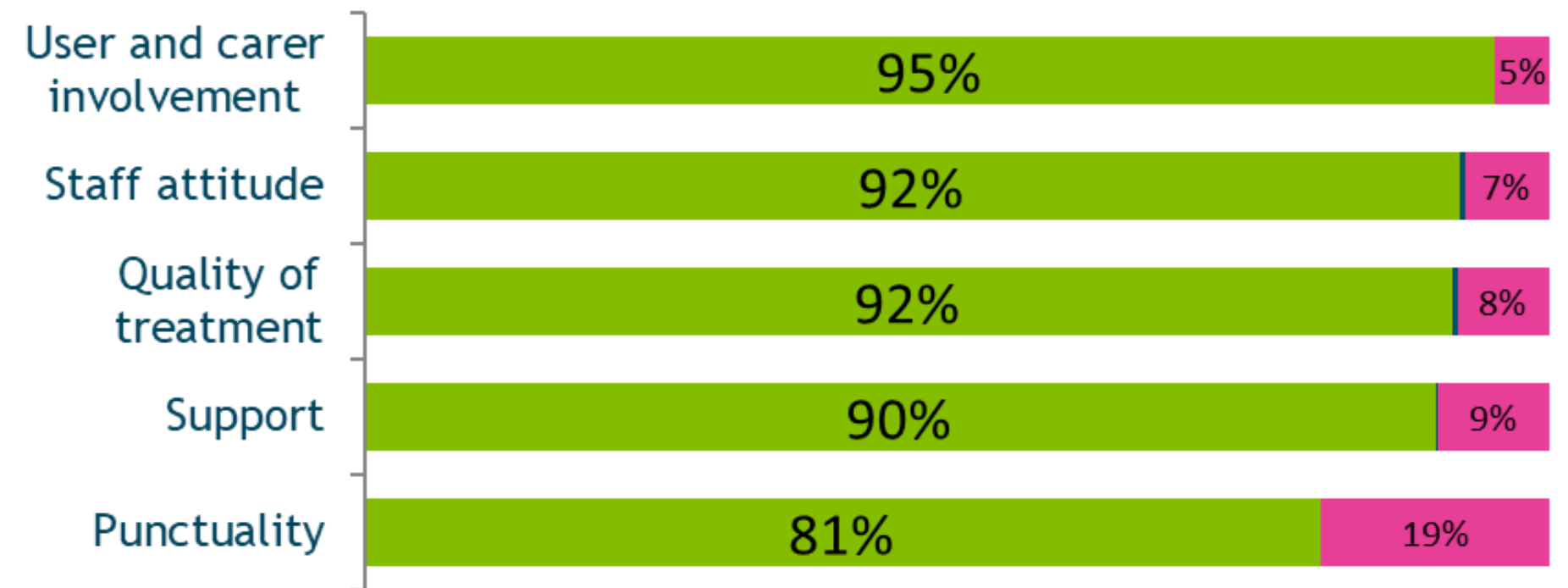
- ➔ Patients who were able to access dental services spoke highly of their quality, and of staff members being kind and supportive. However, issues around access to services affect patient experience.
- ➔ There are reports of NHS patients waiting for more than six months for appointments; or receiving less routine appointments than they need.
- ➔ Access to dental care for those not currently registered with a dentist in their local area is a serious issue, as many patients become unable to access any kind of non-emergency dental treatment.
- ➔ Patients who cannot register with a dentist and those on long waiting lists are concerned about their issues becoming severe because of being left untreated.
- ➔ Some NHS patients who were denied registration or waited a long time for an appointment report that registration locally and fast appointments are available to private patients paying fees unaffordable for most residents. This contributes to health inequalities and to distrust in dental practices.

Overall opinion of dentists:

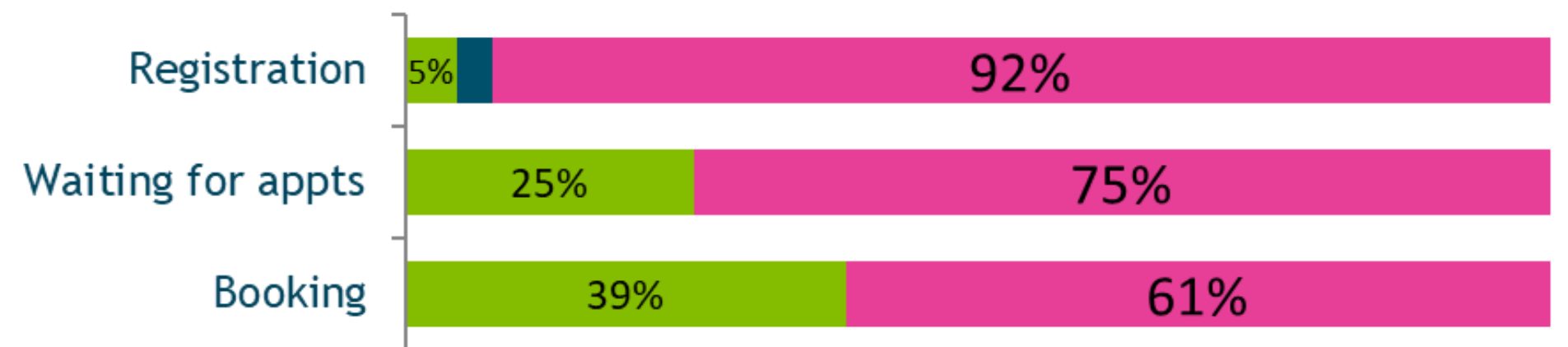


Patients are happy with dental services, IF THEY CAN ACCESS THEM.

What works well:



What doesn't work:



Dental surgeries offer a good level of service; with supportive medical staff providing a trustworthy, high-quality service, patients feel involved in their care and empowered to make decisions about it. Good communication leads to good preventative care.

My dentist is an excellent Dentist!! I have always been a very nervous patient. From my first appointment with her, she showed compassion, listened to me, addressed my concerns and always made sure I felt comfortable with any procedure she was about to perform. She has given me good solid advice on the latest products available, which I went on to purchase and continuing to help me with my gum issues. She is without a doubt one of the best dentists I have ever had. If you have any dental problems she should be your go-to person. Thank you.

Been for two Hygienist appointments, which have helped transform the way I treat my teeth. She's very attentive, professional and gives great advice on how to keep your teeth healthy, thoroughly recommend.

Helped me with my entire journey of having braces and now my teeth are nice and straight. They were also super helpful after I had my retainers too.

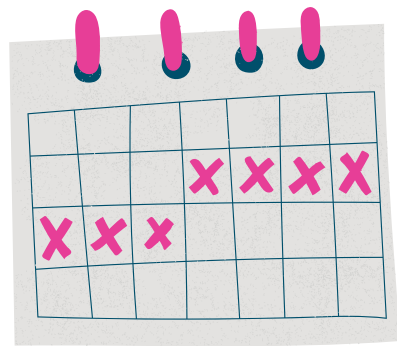
All the staff were patient, helpful and accommodating. When I called to arrange my appointment, the receptionist was thorough in her explanation, information and explained everything to me patiently. The dentist was able to diagnose the issues with my teeth, which were missed by two other dentists. One of whom is a specialist, obviously from another practice. I am extremely satisfied with my treatment.

The most relaxed I've ever felt at a dental clinic! I'm a nervous patient at the best of times, but my doctor and the wonderful staff really put me at ease. Everything was explained in detail, and all options laid out in a considerate and meaningful way. I especially appreciated how this clinic seems to really put patients first, taking as much time as needed for procedures, so that nothing felt rushed. Highly recommended!



Waiting times of six months or more have been reported by some patients. These are often connected to staff shortages, particularly lack of coverage when any staff members are on leave.

Long delays in receiving care are compounded by cancellations; this poses a risk of problems becoming more severe as they are left untreated; there are reports of routine treatments being "rationed" or neglected.



Very unhappy with the service. I received an appointment after three months to be told the dentist was unwell. When I finally was seen I was told my son will be referred somewhere else; it has now been over two months and I still haven't heard from them. It's very frustrating.

Very disappointed. Because of COVID haven't been able to see the dentist for a while. Now that I really need, contact them and they don't want to see me anymore. Very bad practice.

This place needs to be shut down...What's the point opening they never answer your call... can't get an appointment, it takes ages... no booking till December still receptionist is on holiday. If its so busy employ more people.

I have been waiting for two months for a new appointment but suddenly they cancelled it via text message. They said that I would be on the waiting list another week after.

The practice is ok, the dentists, assistants / nurses are all really nice and friendly. However, I've been living in the area for three years now, I am disabled following an accident in 2012, so I find keeping my teeth clean really difficult. My dentist at the RLH suggested trying to see a hygienist at least twice a year, which I was doing until I moved to this area and dental practice. I only get one hygienist appointment per year now and when I do, they just scale, but never polish. I keep emailing them to ask why and never get an answer

Haven't been able to get a tooth cleaning for over a year, despite having had a baby and having all sorts of related problems. Haven't once been able to use my maternal exemption certificate and it's expiring soon... All my other pregnant friends and those with newborns have been able to access normal services. Not sure why this dentist is so poor.

Offered me an appointment in February 2022 for a booking made in September 2021. Asking someone to wait 5 months to get a hole filled on the NHS.

Patients needing antibiotics for dental infections are particularly at risk if no urgent appointments are available; as GPs typically do not prescribe antibiotics for dental issues.

If no dentist appointments are available in their own surgeries, these patients depend on often overstretched urgent dental care services.

When you can get a appointment the service is great. I'm just sorry I CAN'T SCHEDULE MY LAST TWO JAW INFECTIONS to fit into their appointment book. I ask or beg even for antibiotics for the infection and get coldly told not gonna happen cause you can't get a appointment so you're gonna be in pain for however long it lasts. i've got no choice but to come here but the attitude needs to change. so now ive got a jaw infection. no meds and in pain awesome job and yes I, m being sarcastic.



There are reports of referrals to specialist services being delayed; and poor communication about appointments, delays and waiting times.

Some NHS patients report that private patients paying larger fees are prioritised for appointments.



Dentist claims to be NHS but once you register as an NHS patient they won't actually let you book an appointment, they claim that even the waiting list is closed and the only option is to pay a hefty private fee. Always pushing private services, aesthetics and teeth whitening. They refused an NHS appointment for a basic check up for my 4 year old. Dreadful service and clearly very financially driven. Today I received an email telling me that I would be de-registered unless I booked a (private) hygienist appointment, but they still won't allow me a check up. Awful.

They accept other people without an appointment and they sent me away lying that they cannot find my NHS reg. The lady at the reception was not even striking the keyboard while lying to my face. I have been in pain for a week not sleeping not eating. Discrimination and unfair approach is what to expect.

This clinic will reject NHS services to offer the same service privately, furthermore their service is overpriced for what is a very small clinic with few or little dental devices, they don't fix teeth just pull them and then propose implants just for profits, stay away from these butchers.

I was referred for an NHS tooth extraction. When I first called they said they did not have the referral. I called my dentist to ensure it was sent; it was. I called back 5 minutes later and they actually looked and had the referral. They said I couldn't book it in though, and that I would be called in the next week to book an appointment with the actual extraction at least a month from now; but, if I wanted to do it privately I could get it done in two days. I am in extreme pain and the options they've presented to me our waiting a month or paying a large amount. I am really unimpressed with the timelines and how expensive it is to get proper care.

My son got referred 9 months ago, I've been calling on a weekly basis for the last 6 weeks to try and book an appointment - either nobody answers the phone, I'm put through to a department who are unable to book the appointment, given numbers that are no longer in service. It's a disgrace.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets has been regularly receiving a large number of calls from patients complaining about being unable to register with an NHS dentist. There are numerous reports of patients who say that they have contacted multiple practices, in some cases more than 20, only to be told that no new NHS patients are being registered.

Patients being unable to register with a dentist has a serious impact:

- ➔ Patients who cannot register with a dentist effectively lack access to non-urgent dental treatment; this poses a risk for any issues that do not cause immediate pain to worsen and become more difficult to treat as they are being neglected.
- ➔ Accessing emergency dental treatment - usually via 111 - is difficult; in some cases patients report not receiving treatment because they were deemed not urgent enough, even for issues causing concern and discomfort; including broken teeth, infections needing root canal treatment or antibiotics.
- ➔ At least some of the surgeries closed for registration to new NHS patients continue to take on new private patients, who pay steep prices. This furthers health inequalities and causes distrust in dentists, as refusal to register NHS patients is seen as a matter of profit rather than genuine capacity.

Just called the dentist today, asked them if they are NHS supported- they said no; I asked if there is anywhere else I can contact, they told me "nowhere around E14 are NHS supported!". What a joke! My tooth is wobbly! Absolutely absurd.

I can't find an NHS dentist anywhere in Tower Hamlets. My son is in severe pain, he just started an apprenticeship making £90/week, there's no way he could afford to pay privately. It's really unacceptable- we tried 25 dental practices, they all claim to be NHS and they all have appointments available this week- but only for private patients. We also tried going through 111 for dental triage and he was denied any help, despite being in severe pain.

I thought I'd contact you in case I can be directed to a dental surgery in my area taking NHS patients. I have been asking around for over a year and several surgeries have said they're only taking private. I live in E14, in Poplar.

Lack of NHS dentists accepting NHS patients appears to be a particularly severe issue in the E14/ Poplar/ Isle of Dogs area.

There are reports of patients being de-registered for not being able to attend routine checkups; as a result, they lost access to the care they needed later on.

This practice is one of many who are unregistering long term patients in the middle of a pandemic. We are now being left in the mercy of NHS 111, who refer you to practices far away. These dental practices need to be exposed for being Covid opportunists.

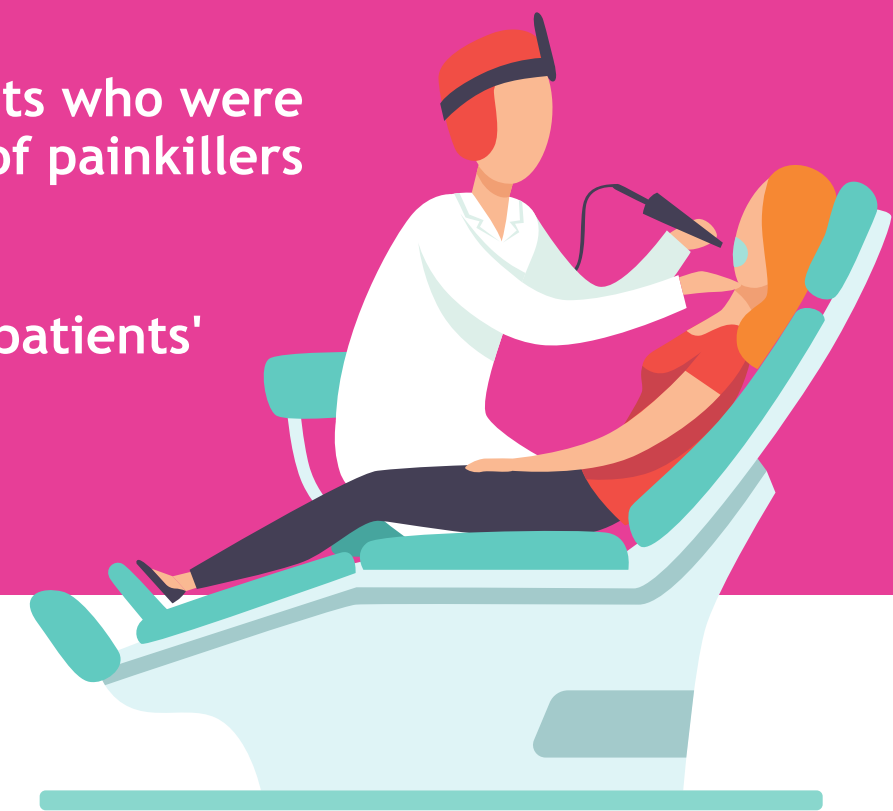
What is the impact of patients being unable to register with an NHS dentist or to access routine dental care reliably?

What we know:

- ➔ Routine issues left unchecked or untreated can become acute or more difficult to treat down the line.
- ➔ Patients experiencing pain or other risks to their health and wellbeing cannot always access urgent treatment; and even when they do it may be superficial without follow-up from primary care dentists.
- ➔ Patients needing antibiotics may have difficulty accessing them, leading to serious health risks and worsening pain.
- ➔ There are cases of children and adults left in severe pain because they were not able to access the dental services they needed.
- ➔ Differences in access between NHS and private patients are furthering health inequalities.

Questions for further research:

- ➔ How do patients who aren't registered with an NHS dentist cope with dental issues?
- ➔ Are patients who cannot register with a dentist repeatedly turning up in 111 dental triage, for issues that could have been dealt with by an NHS dentist? Hospital-based urgent treatment centres? A&E?
- ➔ Does the lack of follow-up primary care after receiving emergency dental services cause patients to return? (For example: to repeatedly receive antibiotics for dental abscesses in a tooth that needs a root canal).
- ➔ Does the lack of adequate dental treatment in patients who were unable to access it cause excessive/ inadequate use of painkillers and/or antibiotics?
- ➔ How does lack of access to primary dentistry impact patients' overall health, well-being and productivity?



What needs to happen?

- **A more rapid and radical reform of the way dentistry is commissioned and provided** - recognising that the current arrangements do not meet the needs of many people who cannot access NHS dental care in a timely way and acknowledge issues faced by the dental profession.
- **Using the reform of commissioning to tackle the twin crises of access and affordability** - ensuring that people are not excluded from dental services because of lack of provision locally or difficulty in meeting charges. Currently, there are significant inequalities that must be removed. New arrangements should be based on maximising access to NHS dental services, with particular emphasis on reducing inequalities.
- **Greater clarity in the information about NHS dentistry** - improving information, including online, so that people have a clear picture of where and how they can access services, and the charges they will need to pay. Particularly, the reform must address dentistry 'registration' which causes significant confusion for both services and patients.
- **Look at using dental practices to support people's general health** - harnessing opportunities, such as the development of Primary Care Networks, to link oral health to other key issues such as weight management and smoking cessation.