

Helping people to get dental care

What difference have we made?

A Healthwatch Kent report



April 2022

We hear from more people who are struggling to get a dentist appointment than any other issue. Over the last two years, the number of people contacting our Information & Signposting service about NHS dentists has continued to increase.

Whilst we don't have a magic wand to get people an appointment, we do listen to every individual person and support them with their unique issue. We signpost many people to the **Kent Dental Helpline (0300 1234 412)** which should have up-to-date information about which surgeries are accepting NHS patients as well as where you can get urgent dental care.

In some cases we've been able to get people the dental care that they need. Here you can read just two examples of the difference we made.



Ensuring Jane* could continue her treatment

Jane got in touch with us because she needed to see a dentist before she could continue treatment for a long-term health condition.

She has osteoporosis and has monthly injections as part of her treatment. Jane needed to change her medication but had been told that she must have a dental check-up before they would agree to changing her medication.



“I could be refused this injection next month which could have severe side effects on me. I have already had sacral and pelvis fractures due to my osteoporosis and any break in my treatment could make my condition worse. I need to have this injection next month but will probably be refused it because of not having a dental check-up beforehand. Could you please advise if there is anything that I am able to do?”

Jane had already contacted multiple different dental practices but none of them were taking on new patients and wouldn't agree to see her.

We already work closely with Medway Community Health who run a community dental service. We spoke to them and they offered Jane an appointment.

Jane told us she was concerned about filling in the form, in case she did it incorrectly, so we helped her complete the paperwork. A few hours later, Jane called to let us know she had been booked in for a dental check-up the same week.

“Thank you so much for all your help, I was really starting to stress about this.”

What impact have we had?

If we hadn't managed to get Jane a dental appointment, she could have had to pay an average cost of **£50** for a check-up as a new patient at a private dentist.[1]

The NHS cost for a check-up is currently **£23.80**, meaning we saved Jane **£26.21**. Using our Social Return on Investment framework we can analyse the social impact for Jane. Thanks to our intervention, Jane was able to get a dental appointment and therefore get the medication that she needed for her osteoporosis. We also removed the stress and anxiety of the situation and helped her complete the necessary paperwork. She no longer had to worry about the possibility of delays in her treatment and possible side effects that could have caused such as more bone fractures.

Mental wellbeing valuation Statistical analysis and other studies[2] value a significant increase in mental wellbeing as between **£10,000** and **£15,000** per year. The exact value depends on which tools are used to measure the value. QALY[3] calculations producing the higher sum and WELLBY[4] values producing the lower.

If we propose that we have improved Jane's wellbeing for just one month, this averages at a social value of **£1,041**.

Physical wellbeing valuation We have used a financial proxy to estimate the social value of the detriment to health which Jane might have experienced if she had not received her dental check up and subsequent medication to treat her osteoporosis. The recommended treatments for this would be an over-the-counter pain relief at approximately **£20**, and physio or hydrotherapy at **£120** [5]for one session.

If we propose that we have prevented Jane from suffering pain from fractures associated with her condition, this equates to a social value of **£140**.

Our intervention has provided Jane **£1,181** worth of social value and saved her a direct cost of **£26.21**

[1] Dentist Check-up Booking & Cost | Bupa Dental Care UK

[2] UK Social Value Bank | HACT

[3] Valuation of risks to life and health: monetary Value of a Life Year (VOLY) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[4] Green Book supplementary guidance: wellbeing - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[5] Osteopath London - Best Osteopathy in East, North London Zone 1, 2 (bodytonicclinic.co.uk)

[6] Cost utility analysis: health economic studies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Pregnant, homeless and in need of a dentist

A complex care nurse got in touch because one of their pregnant patients was unable to get dental care. She was homeless and poor dental care was affecting her pregnancy.

She didn't know what to suggest to her patient, so she came to us. We signposted her to contact the Kent Dental Helpline and they were able to arrange for the lady to be seen by a dentist.

By getting her an appointment, we saved her **£26.21**. If she hadn't been able to see an NHS dentist, a private appointment could cost around **£50**.

We have also analysed the social value behind ensuring she got the dental care that she needed during her pregnancy.

Studies have shown that poor dental health during pregnancy can be harmful to the Mum and their baby's overall health. Without further details of what issues this lady experienced whilst waiting for dental treatment, we can only give an estimated evaluation of the social value behind the dental appointment they received, which prevented further ill-health.

To complete this estimate, we have used QALYs which are based on cost-effectiveness figures of treatment from the NHS. QALYs represent one year of life in an improved state of health quality as a result of an identifiable intervention. One QALY is valued at an average of **£25,000** [1] which works out to **£2,083** per month. When using QALYs, it is important to consider the contribution of other parties to the improvement in quality of life. In this instance, we would consider ourselves to have had a 20% contribution to this outcome through our signposting role.

If we propose that we have improved her quality of life for the next six months by signposting her to Kent Dental Helpline who were able to secure her an appointment, this means we have produced a total of **£2,500** worth of social value, as well as saving her the direct cost of **£26.21**.

[1] Cost utility analysis: health economic studies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Maybe you know someone who needs us?

Get in touch here



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Text us on 07525 861 639. By
texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's
British Sign Language interpreter
will make contact.

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