



Dental Website Reviews

An observational review of the dental
websites within Luton: A revisit

January 2022

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Introduction

In Luton there were 24 dental practices (www.nhs.uk) serving a population of 214,658 people (www.localhealth.org.uk). Currently, in Luton, the commissioning of dental health services falls within primary care and is commissioned by NHS England. However, commissioning is more 'PLACE' based and as such, this is shared or delegated locally. In Luton this falls namely to BLMK Commissioning Collaborative. The guidelines are set out for commissioning these services by NHS England and NHS Improvements and can be found here: [NHS England » Dental commissioning and policy](#).

Dental care can be accessed privately or through NHS services, which are provided at a subsidised rate, depending on what category they fall into. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, dental services were suspended for a time, unless they were emergency situations or needs. Dental treatment was not able to be carried out virtually in most cases and subsequently, there is a large backlog of dental care needs. This is something that has been in the feedback to Healthwatch Luton.

There is still a lot of concern across the Healthwatch Network, and the local Health and Wellbeing Board feel this area is of concern locally. With a focus on remote services, Healthwatch Luton wanted to carry out a review of the websites and compare this to the previous one carried out amidst the pandemic.

Methodology

Healthwatch Luton based the review criteria on queries that had been raised and information needed to make an informed decision about care choices.

As the reviews were carried out in a non-invasive way – by visiting the websites online and completing the checklist, no consent was required from the surgeries. All data collected was within the public domain, and as such, explicit consent was not needed from dental practices. Dental practices were advised of the intent to carry out the reviews and assured there would be no interruption or requirement put upon them.

Any recommendations made would have taken into consideration the pandemic at the time, the workload and capacity of the practices. Volunteers were fully briefed before completing the reviews. Once the reviews were completed, they were sent to be reported on.

To ensure there were no changes missed, each website was reviewed in one go, with no return once completed. To allow for any conflict of interest, those carrying out the reviews did not carry them out on their own dentist.

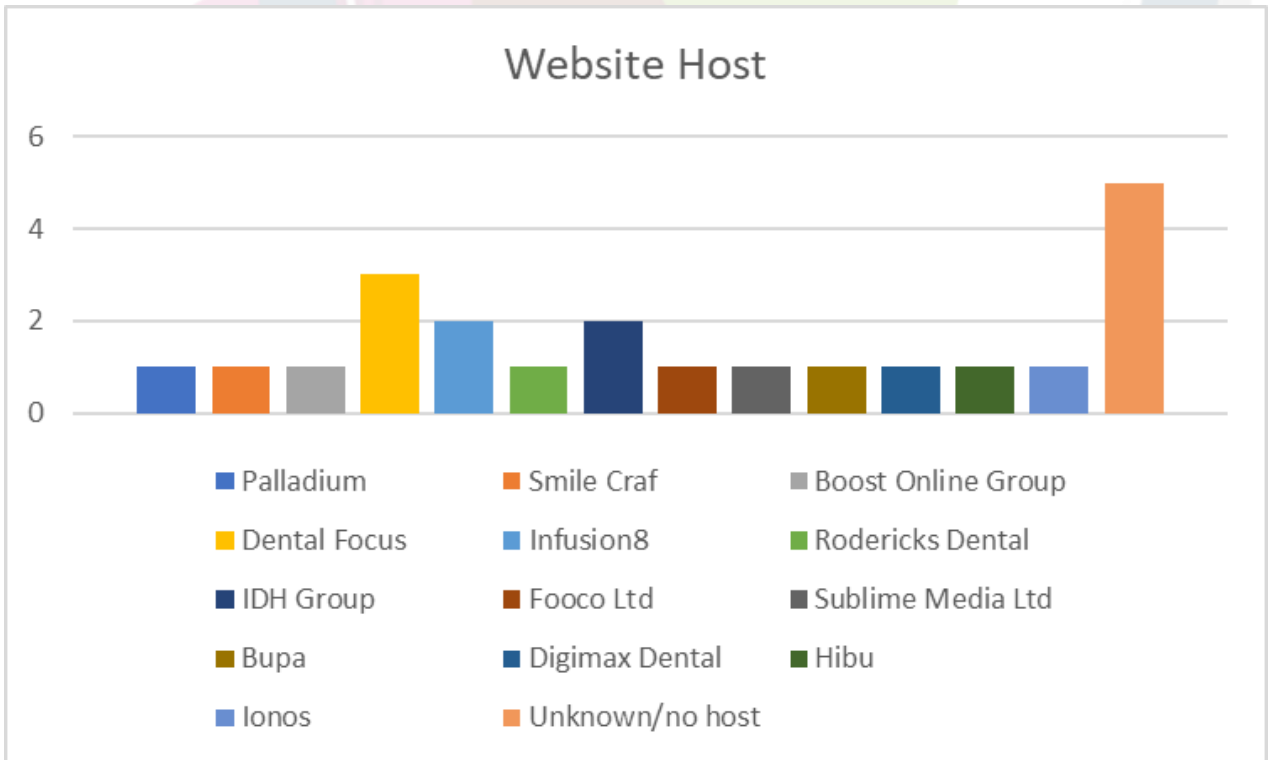


Results

Healthwatch Luton reviewed the websites of 24 dental practices in Luton during November 2021. From those 24 dental practices, two did not have a website and 58% (14) had a Facebook page. This had reduced compared with last year, when 70% (16) practices had a Facebook page.

When considering if the pages were up to date, it was decided if they had been updated within 2021 they were 'up-to-date'. Of the 22 websites, 68% (15) were updated and it was unclear whether 32% (7) had been updated recently.

There were a variety of different hosts for the websites, with only one user in most cases. There were four websites where it was difficult to see who was hosting the website, and one which appeared to not have a host named.



Of the dental practices, 63% (14) had a Facebook page and 18% (4) did not. Some pages were obviously up dated, whereas others had not been updated in some time, with one not having updated since February 2021. As well as Facebook, some (50% - 11) practices had alternative social media accounts, such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

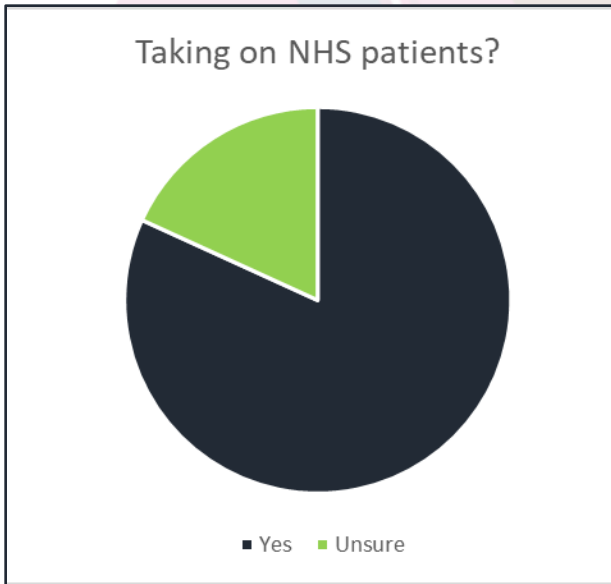


Results

With the current concerns for access to treatment and care, and the ability to book appointments, Healthwatch Luton looked at whether or not this was a possibility to book appointments online.

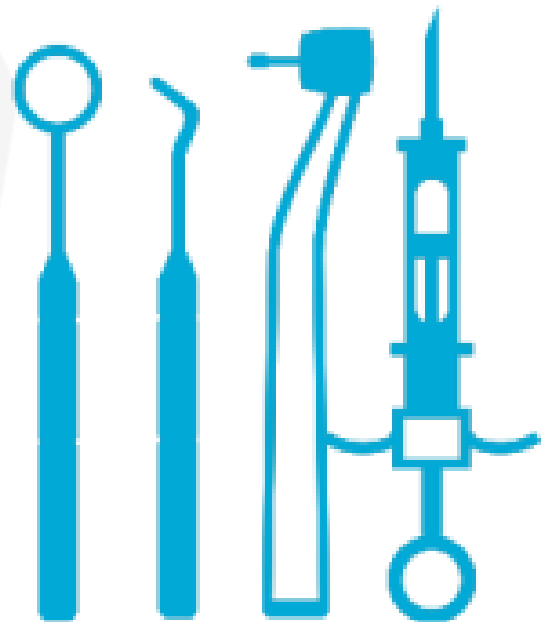
Of the websites reviewed, there were 18% (4) who had an online booking option. The rest had a mixture of telephone numbers to call, email addresses to contact or forms to fill in and someone would get back to the individuals. One website did mention they had online bookings but there were none available at the point of reviewing. It was also noted there was quite a tricky process to follow to find the area for booking appointments on a few 14% (3) of the websites.

When looking to see if the dentist takes NHS patients, it was not clear on some (18% - 4) websites. Of the websites reviewed it was clear that 81% (18) were taking NHS patients, whilst one specified it had to be via an NHS referral and another had the list for private and NHS patient fees on the website. This was the same as the previous reviews.



Whilst the pandemic restrictions have been mostly lifted, the websites were still reviewed to see what covid information was available. On 72% (16) of the websites, there was a mention of changes related to coronavirus, whether that was a link to the government website or showing a change in internal procedures. This is no different to the previous reviews carried out.

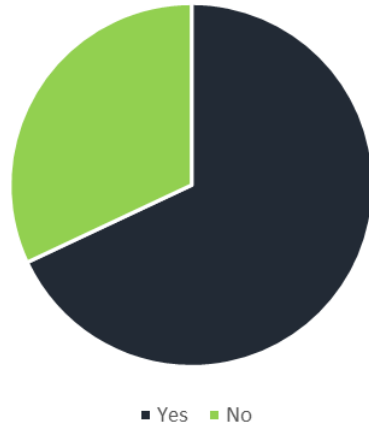
Of the websites reviewed, 60% (13) had information regarding emergency treatment, which included numbers to call and one website pledged 'same day' appointments for emergencies. This is an increase of 17% from 43% in the last reviews.



Results

Around 68% (15) of the websites had information about the way to make a complaint or compliment – this was either by filling in a ‘contact us’ form, or by following the procedure outlined. This was slightly less websites than previously. On 32% there was no obvious or clear way to make any comments.

Comments, complaints & compliments procedure



None of the websites had information or a link to Healthwatch Luton. Legally, all NHS providers should have the contact information to the local Healthwatch on their website.

Section 16 of the Standard NHS Contract 2019/20:

“SC16 Complaints 16.1 The Commissioners and the Provider must each publish, maintain and operate a complaints procedure in compliance with the Fundamental Standards and other Law and Guidance.

“All 16.2 The Provider must:

16.2.1 provide clear information to Service Users, their Carers and representatives, and to the public, displayed prominently in the Services Environment as appropriate, on how to make a complaint or to provide other feedback and on how to contact Local Healthwatch”



It would be useful for all practices to have the complaints procedure on their website, as well as any forms that may need to be filled in, and for this to be separate to the usual ‘Contact Us’ page.



Recommendations

Based on the results from the reviews of the websites, combined with previous reviews, Healthwatch Luton would like the following recommendations to still be considered by all dental practices in Luton, to enable the public to access consistent information about the dental practice, whichever they choose to use.

- **Include information about Healthwatch Luton**

Websites did not contain information about Healthwatch Luton. It is a legal requirement, that all NHS providers have this on their website (see page 7 for information) and as such it would be a recommendation of this report that this information is added to the websites. It would also be of benefit to the practice, as there would be an opportunity for Healthwatch Luton to share any information gathered about them in a Brief Summary Report, which could be produced monthly and quarterly.

- **Inspection ratings**

When looking for a care provider, including a dentist, patients ought to be able to easily see the rating given to the practice on their last inspection, and the date of the last inspection. It would be a recommendation of this report that this is something that is added to all dental practice websites.

- **Complaint information**

It would be useful for people to be able to find the information about complaints procedures and how they can contact the practice to make a compliment or complaint with ease. It would be a recommendation of this report for all practices to make sure this is visible and easy to access on their websites.

- **Treatment and information**

Not all websites had the information about treatment costs or if the treatment was available. It would be a recommendation of this report that the websites are updated regularly to reflect the treatment and services currently available. It would also be a recommendation to have prices for the NHS treatment bands on the website to support this information.

- **Registration**

It is a general problem for individuals to access dental care at present, and it is not apparent on websites if they are taking on new patients. It would be a recommendation of this report for this information about accessing care as a new patient be accessible on the website.



Quality Assurance

To quality assure the work, Healthwatch Luton reviewed a small sample (just over 10% - 3) of the reviews, to ensure they were an accurate reflection of the information found on the websites.

Healthwatch Luton ensured the information was a correct and true reflection of the websites and will ensure any recommendations are shared with LCCG, NHS E, CQC and the practices.

Data Information

Whilst the data was in the public domain, it was gathered and collated by Healthwatch Luton and as such this report would remain the property of Healthwatch Luton and any use for sources should be referenced.

Evaluation

These observational reviews were part of a programme of activities reviewing websites of a variety of different local providers, including doctors, care homes and pharmacies. This piece of work has been useful as it has shown where people are accessing the internet to find information out, what they are able to find. The purpose is to hopefully assist with the wider system to improve and understand what is in the public domain.

It is important to note that it is a useful activity to undertake to see what is in the public domain, it does not account for those who are not digital, through digital exclusion or digital poverty.

Healthwatch Luton will share the information within this report with the dental practices in Luton and with the commissioners of services, Luton Oral Health Alliance, NHS England and CQC. The report will feed into the regional and national work surrounding dentists.

Healthwatch Luton will consider carrying out these reviews again in 18months – two years, when the providers have had a chance to consider the recommendations, however, the recommendations will be reviewed in the next twelve months.



healthwatch Luton

www.healthwatchluton.co.uk

t: 01582 817 060

e: info@healthwatchluton.co.uk

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