



# Enter & View

mydentist St Austell

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Details of visit

Service provider	Mydentist St Austell
Service Address	28 East Hill, St Austell, PL25 4TR
Date and time	30 <sup>th</sup> August 2024 9am – 12pm
Authorised representatives	Abi Harding-White

## 1.2 Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Cornwall would like to thank patients and staff for their positive contribution to this Enter and View visit and the subsequent report

## 1.3 Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date above and is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time of the visit.

# 2 What is Enter and View?

As a local Healthwatch we are authorised to “Enter and View” health and social care services through the following legislation;

- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Local Authorities Regulations 2013 (part 4)

These services can include hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists, and pharmacies.

The goal of Enter and View is to see services in action and understand the experiences of individuals who use them. It is an opportunity for us to observe service delivery, listen to the views of the people using health and social care services and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

Enter and View visits are organised based on feedback received about individual services, in response to themes identified in our research, or when services have a good reputation enabling us to share examples of best practice from the perspective of people who experience the service first-hand.

Healthwatch Cornwall Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies. If at any time an authorised representative observes anything that they feel uncomfortable about they inform their lead who will inform the service manager, ending the visit.

In addition, if any member of staff wishes to raise a safeguarding issue about their employer, they will be directed to the CQC where they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.

## 2.1 Purpose of visit

- To observe the nature and quality of service facilities
- To observe how people experience the service

- To gather views from patients and staff on the service

## 2.2 Strategic drivers

Over the past year, the most consistent feedback Healthwatch Cornwall have received has been related to dentistry and access to dental care. In response to these concerns, we are undertaking a dentistry research project and conducting Enter and View visits to dental practices across the region. We selected practices based on their provision of NHS care and their location, ensuring that we cover a broad geographic area within Cornwall. This approach helps us understand the accessibility and quality of dental services across different communities. Healthwatch Cornwall can use this evidence to make recommendations and inform changes for both individual services as well as system wide.

## 2.3 Methodology

This was an announced visit, and we worked with the practice to organise the date and time of the visit. An initial email was sent explaining the role of Healthwatch Cornwall, what Enter and View is, the purpose of the visit, and a proposed date and time for the visit to take place. A further email was sent confirming the agreed details of the visit and included a formal letter, Enter and View notice and a general Healthwatch Cornwall poster.

The authorised representative (Enter and View officer) conducted the visit between 9am and 12pm in the main waiting area.

Patients were approached and asked if they would be willing to discuss their experiences. Additionally, they were asked if they felt they had time to do so before their appointment so as not to cause stress or disrupt service delivery. A reflective conversational approach was used to gather feedback on what they felt the practice did well and what could be improved.

In addition, we were able to speak with the practice manager to gather their perspective. Observations were also made regarding the quality of the facilities and patient experience of the service, including their interactions with staff.

At the end of the visit, the authorised representative was able to give initial feedback to the practice manager and explained the next steps regarding reporting.

# 3 Findings

## 3.1 Overview

Mydentist St Austell provides around 81% NHS dental care with around 13,080 patients currently. The practice has six dentists, three qualified nurses, two student nurses, one hygienists and two receptionists. They are currently recruiting an extra dentist to provide both NHS and Private care and another hygienist to replace one who has recently left.

It is easy to navigate to by car but does not have a car park. There is limited street parking in the surrounding area and a pay and display car park a short walk away. The pay and display car park is now paid by phone app only, there are no machines. The practice is located a 3-minute walk from the bus nearest bus stop and a five-minute walk from the train station. The outside of the building is well signed with the opening hours and list of clinicians on display.

The building is accessible with a stair lift, accessible toilet and ground floor surgery rooms with one having step free access. In some of the downstairs surgery rooms they also have specialised chairs able to accommodate heavier weights. If a patient does not inform the practice about accessibility needs prior to the appointment the practice will still accommodate the patient by asking the dentist to transfer downstairs for their appointment. The practice also has a hearing loop. There are two waiting rooms, downstairs by reception and upstairs.

The practice is not currently taking on new NHS patients. The mydentist website states it is taking on new patients but does not specify whether this is NHS or private. On the NHS "find a dentist" page the practice states it takes on NHS patients when availability allows and that it takes on new NHS patients if they are children under 17 years of age, adults over 18, or entitled to free dental care.

There is information for this practice in two different locations online under two different names.

- There is a page for the practice on the mydentist website.
- On the NHS "find a dentist" page the practice is listed under the name St Austell Dental Centre (Whitecross). Once on the NHS profile, the website link takes you to the mydentist website.

- When the practice is googled, results are provided for both names. The addresses for both are the same however the connection is not clear when conducting a generic search.

## **3.2 Practice Observations**

There was a good atmosphere throughout the practice. Staff were observed to be laughing together and in good spirits, and they had good rapport with patients. Patients were at ease and seemed to know the staff well.

The windowsill and door frame outside the front of the building were visibly unclean but inside the practice was clean and décor bright. In terms of maintenance of facilities, it was noted that the toilet handle was loose, didn't properly latch when shut and the lock did not turn red when in use. In the upstairs waiting area, one of the lights in the alcove was not working which was impacting patients filling in forms.

There was not enough seating in the upstairs waiting area with two chairs. It was observed a couple of times that there were four or five people upstairs and patients were perching on the windowsill or standing in the hallway.

The reception team were observed to be very helpful and friendly, advising over the phone that they could fit in emergency appointments and that while they are not taking on NHS patients, they offer affordable private care.

## **3.3 Summary of Feedback**

Overall, patients were very positive about their experiences at mydentist St Austell, all mentioning how accommodating the team is and the excellent quality of care. Comments on areas for improvement were limited to timings of appointments and the lack of seating in the upstairs waiting room.

Through the conversation with the practice manager, we were able to identify several of the practice's strengths which are reflected in patient feedback, particularly with regards to management of appointments and the quality of care. They were also able to share with us a few of their challenges as a practice and within NHS dentistry, suggesting that engaging and informing service users would help with service delivery.

## **3.4 Patient Feedback**

We were able to gather feedback from ten patients. All patients were local to St Austell and there was a mix of patients driving and using public transport to the practice.

## Positive Feedback

- The dental team are professional, courteous and thorough.
- The dentists explain everything well.
- The dentists provide follow up care by calling to check on recovery.
- The practice ensures patients are seen on ground floor if patients have mobility issues.
- Receptionists are very good and easy to get hold of.
- Patient called in for an emergency appointment and were booked straight in.
- The practice fits patients in quickly for appointments.
- Staff are welcoming, smile and are happy to see patients.

Listed are some of the positive comments we received about mydentist St Austell

- "You come out knowing exactly what's next and get your next appointment then and there"
- "I've always had good service here"
- "Always seen me fairly quickly for an emergency appointment"
- "Used to be anxious but he listens to me. Best dentist I ever had"
- "Good experience. Never had any problems"
- "They're brilliant, and they're good with her" (toddler)
- "Very happy. No complaints"

## Constructive Feedback

- Patient arrived ten minutes early, but the appointment was twenty minutes delayed which impacts cost of parking.
- The appointment was delayed, and it was difficult to keep their toddler still.
- Patients arriving and not being able to sit down (upstairs). There were four patients waiting but only two chairs and they felt there was space for more seating.
- Patient found it difficult to understand the dentist the last time they were there. The representative followed up on this conversation after the appointment and the patient said the communication was much better this time.
- Fairly easy to get an appointment but dentist only works Fridays which can be limiting.

## 3.5 Staff Feedback

We were able to speak with the practice manager. The themes of this conversation were around their strengths and challenges as a practice, and within the wider context of NHS dentistry.

### Practice strengths

- Patients are given an appointment card and sent email and text reminders which reduces the number of missed appointments.
- Medical forms are sent in advance to ensure the practice is as paperless as possible, however, not many patients are receptive to this and do them in person
- Open and honest communication with patients around expectations and how they must operate within the context of NHS care.
- Where there are free-floating patients (patients not assigned to specific dentists) due to lack of dentists, they ensure the patient is still appropriately triaged and see an available dentist, taking into consideration space and the factors at play.
- The practice has NHS contractual obligations to fulfil but pride themselves on putting patients first. This is dependent on need, resources available and the dentist's professional opinion. As such patients may be referred for any treatment outside of the scope of a general dentist.
- If a dentist goes away during a patient's course of treatment, they try to foresee any issues that might occur during that time and bring treatment forward to mitigate this.
- There are 1-2 emergency appointments in the afternoon, which also allows for travel time as some patients travel miles to not lose their access to NHS treatment.

#### Practice challenges

- Recruitment and retention. The practice team feels that in Cornwall the issue is accessibility and cost of living.
- They get a lot of calls to join the practice, and they signpost to the NHS waiting list.
- Any complaints are more about timings and do not reflect on quality of care.
- Trying to balance routine, stabilisation, emergencies, dentist career goals as well as dentists offering private work outside of their NHS contractual hours.

### 3.6 Feedback on NHS dentistry

The team think that the general opinion of NHS dentistry is low at the moment because people feel the system does not appropriately enable dentists to do what's required to look after patients.

Further to this, they suggested that engaging with patients would help, ensuring they understand how NHS dentistry works and the role the patients play in effective service delivery. When patients miss appointments, practices often cannot fill the appointment slots last minute which impacts their ability to meet targets and means they also do not get paid. This further exacerbates the recruitment and retention issue

which then contributes to complaints from service users about difficulties accessing care.

The NHS considers patients to be no longer to be an active patient after a course of treatment has been completed. However, most dental practices will keep patients on as long as they keep up their appointments.

## 4 Recommendations

The visit was overall a positive one and Healthwatch Cornwall have offered some recommendations based on observations and feedback from patients.

- Maintenance;
  - Ensure the front of the building is clean.
  - Fix the light in the upstairs waiting area.
  - Fix the toilet door handle and lock downstairs.
- Increase the number of chairs upstairs.
- Introduce a system which enables staff to monitor and stagger how many patients are being sent upstairs to wait at any given time.
- Consider whether adding entertainment for children could be beneficial either with dental related colouring or children's books.
- Continue to ensure new patients are taken from the central NHS waiting list.
- To prevent confusion for patients and ensure they have access to clear information;
  - Clarify on the mydentist website and on the automated answering machine what type of patients the practice is taking on; NHS, private or both.
  - Clarify on the NHS "find a dentist" page that the practice is not currently taking on new NHS patients as the current wording is not clear.
  - Clarify and clearly state on all websites that mydentist St Austell and St Austell Dental Centre (Whitecross) are one and the same or change the name on the "find a dentist" page so that they match mydentist.

## 5 Provider Response

Comments about the report

- A Window cleaner previously attended each month, however this stopped when the previous Practice Manager left. Stacey has re-commissioned them. The outside of the building get quickly dirty, due to main road and bus route. The Practice Manager will wipe down the ground floor windowsill between each window cleaner visit. The whole building is power washed ad hoc. This is a challenge as we need to obtain permission from the council to close the road to do so. The social distancing sticker on the main door has now been removed.
- The toilet handle has been reported to our internal maintenance who are organising for a local contractor to attend the practice as soon as possible to fix the issue
- The light in the alcove was fixed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October
- Additional seating was immediately reviewed by the Practice Manager following the visit, however the space is very limited, so we have only been able to add an additional chair. The Practice Manager has been reviewing whether the staggering of appointment types may assist with patient flow.
- The Practice Manager has reflected upon the constructive feedback with the reception and wider practice team and implemented improved communications from surgery to reception and from reception to patients.
- There is only one dentist that works just on a Friday, all the other dentists work all week - including Fridays. We appreciate it can be challenging for patients who wish to gain an appointment with the Friday only dentist.
- The Practice Manager is reviewing if changes can be made to when certain appointments/treatments are scheduled to see if this assist with patient flow in and out of the practice.

#### Response to the recommendations

- We are conscious of the limited space available to us, but will look to introduce facilities for children colouring at reception.
- The practice does & will continue to accept as many new NHS patients as possible into the practice, as and when our NHS capacity here allows
- Our websites and phone messaging states we are 'taking on new patients'. As the capacity for both fluctuates across our 500 plus practices, sometimes daily, regrettably it is not feasible to be specific down to individual practice level.
- This is a central NHS website. I personally have provided historical feedback to NHS digital regarding some of the wording on this website, but mydentist can regrettably not influence the NHS's chosen wording.

**Contact us:**

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