



# Enter & View

mydentist Helston

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Details of visit

Service provider	mydentist Helston
Service Address	1st Floor, 2 Meneage Street, Helston, TR13 8AB
Date and time	28 <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 Helston provides around 70% NHS dental care with around 8500 patients currently. The practice has four dentists, one hygienist, two therapists, two receptionists and a practice manager.

It is easy to navigate to by car but does not have a car park. There is limited residential parking in the surrounding area and a car park a short walk away which is pay and display. The practice is located in Helston town centre and easily accessible by bus.

The outside of the building is clean and well signed with the opening hours on display and a list of clinicians. In order to access the practice, there is a staircase with handrails up to the first floor and there is no lift available.

The practice is not currently taking on new NHS patients. When they were able to accept new NHS patients, practice reception received hundreds of calls a day from people wanting to join the practice. As the practice have now reached their new NHS patient capacity, accepting new NHS patients has been paused.

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 both takes on NHS patients when availability allows and that it takes on new NHS patients if they are children under 17, adults over 18, or entitled to free dental care. This reflects how the NHS website is built rather than the specific practices of the dental practice itself.

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 Helston Dental practice Partnership but 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 were relevant mydentist posters throughout the practice. The radio was on and patients seemed to be at ease there. The reception and waiting areas are light and spacious with plenty of comfortable seating. There is an information screen and an area by the window that parents and children can sit with colouring paper and pens which were being used. It seemed that appointments were running to schedule as patients were not waiting long to be called in.

The dental team came out in person to collect patients and greeted them in a friendly manner. From the waiting room it appeared as though a clinician took a child to a practice room without waiting for the parent who was moving more slowly with a mobility device.

Receptionists were observed being polite and friendly to everyone both in person and on the phone. The team often seemed to know patients by name which was reflected in the patient feedback and receptionists were observed offering assistance to patients that might have needed help going down the stairs.

There was a clock in a corner directly opposite the reception desk but not in the main waiting area and it was noted that a few patients would look around the waiting area as though looking for the time and it was mentioned by one patient in conversation.

It was noted that throughout the practice the paint was peeling off the walls. The practice manager explained that they repainted a few months ago but there is an issue with damp in the building which mydentist is trying to resolve with the building landlord.

## 3.3 Summary of Feedback

Generally, patients were happy with the service they receive. All patients spoken to gave a positive overall view of their experience. They particularly mentioned easy access to appointments and positive staff interaction. Patients identified areas for improvement, and we have used these to inform the recommendations but understand there may be practical limitations to implementing them such as installing large pieces of equipment in the building.

The practice manager shared that they have improved their service by introducing the new system for emergency appointments and in reducing missed appointments by sending reminders to patients, both of which are echoed in the patient feedback. They

were able to share with us some of their challenges as a practice and in the delivery of stabilisation clinics.

### 3.4 Patient Feedback

We were able to gather feedback from nine patients. Five patients had been there more than 15 years with two saying they had been with the practice there since the 90s. Five patients lived within the Helston area with two patients having travelled from the Lizard. One of the patients travelling from the Lizard used public transport and found the journey easy. One patient had moved to Redruth but kept the same dentist to continue accessing NHS care. The rest of their family managed to register with an NHS dentist in Redruth but that has since gone private and the patient is now the only family member with an NHS dentist.

Five patients were NHS and four were private. Three of the private patients were previously NHS patients; two of them chose private care when their dentist transitioned to private dentistry, and the other patient was told they had to go private with no communication why but thought they might have missed an appointment and were therefore taken off the NHS list.

One patient moved to Cornwall and chose private care but thinks that other people keep their NHS dentist even when they've moved, often choosing to travel miles as it's still cheaper than private dentistry.

There were no notable differences in feedback between NHS and private patients. All patients expressed that their overall experience with the practice had been mainly positive.

#### Positive Feedback

- Dental nurse advocated for a patient to receive the care they needed.
- Accessing care is straight forward.
  - Able to get an appointment the same week after a cancellation.
  - Able to book a hygiene appointment a week after routine appointment.
- During covid a patient requiring regular routine care was prioritised for emergencies and when they couldn't be seen the dentist would be in contact to ease their concern.
- Staff are kind, considerate and pleasant.
- Dentist communicates well with child who is autistic and changes how they explain things to them.
- Reception team are helpful and communicate well.
- The practice sends appointment reminders.

## Constructive Feedback

- Frequent requests to update patient records (This is a requirement of the NHS).
- Expectations that patients are on time but the appointments often are not.
- Follow up appointments required for any treatment are good, but perhaps minor treatments could be completed during the routine appointment time allowing.
- In the waiting room the most prominent information seemed to be regarding costs for private dentistry with mydentist which the patient was confusing for NHS prices.
- Lack of clock in the waiting room.
- The décor in terms of the damp and peeling paint.
- A building with a lift would be helpful as their parent had to change dentists due to not being able to manage the stairs anymore.
- Previous cancellations as the practice were struggling to find staff but this is now improving and they are overall happy with no complaints about quality of care received.

## Comments

“I can get an appointment when I want and seen when I need to be”

“Reception is helpful and they know me”

## 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

- The practice has introduced a triage system for 40 minutes each morning to assess emergency calls and hold emergency appointments in the afternoon. This has improved patient attitude towards the team and improved patient outcomes.
- Patients are sent a form a week before, a text a few days before and this has helped reduce the number of missed appointments to one or two per day. The helpfulness of reminders was also mentioned within patient feedback.

### Practice challenges

- There is an ongoing challenge the recruitment and retention of clinicians

- The practice takes on new patients when it has availability but there is general apprehension about taking on new patients amidst the current trend of clinicians leaving NHS dentistry.

### 3.6 Feedback on NHS dentistry

The NHS has introduced stabilisation for patients which involves a course of treatment to ensure they are stable before they are discharged. This is a middle ground between emergency treatment and routine appointments.

Mydentist Helston has stabilisation clinics on Fridays over the course of 3 hours and slots are 45 minutes. However, they may not be able to continue this. Patients seem to only want emergency appointments as they are either unable to or do not want to pay for a whole course of stabilisation treatment. Therefore, the practice is currently evaluating the effectiveness of this programme and may instead choose to create room for new patient registrations.

## 4 Recommendations

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

- When capacity allows, look to take on patients from the central NHS waiting list to ensure fair access.
- 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 Helston and Helston Dental Practice Partnership are one and the same or change the name on the “find a dentist” page so that they match mydentist.
  - Place NHS cost information in a more prominent position in the waiting room.
- Put a clock in the main waiting room for patients.

- Ensure staff are aware of or can make an initial visual assessment of any possible accessibility needs when collecting patients, carers and service users from the waiting area.
- Consider the long-term suitability of the building in terms of access and damp issues being faced currently, and possible subsequent health implications. In lieu of this, consider how the building could be reasonably adapted (e.g installing a stair lift) to ensure all patients can access the practice.

## 5 Provider Response

### Comments about the report

- Although we would like to put a lift in, this has already been investigated and the fabric of the building will not accommodate one.
- The Practice took on circa 200 new patients earlier this year and are currently at capacity for new patients. New patient NHS capacity is regularly reviewed and the practice will take on more new patients as and when capacity allows.
- As our mydentist practices capacity for NHS and private patients is variable and may change daily in some practices, it is not feasible for us to effectively manage an NHS v Private split across individual practices. When patients contact Helston reception the team explain what is currently available and provide the patient with their options.
- The practice is contractually obligated to display 'accepting new patients' when availability allows on the NHS.uk find a dentist website.  
Our name on the NHS website reflects the name that's on our NHS contract for the practice.
- From the waiting room it appeared as though a clinician took a child to a practice room without waiting for the parent who was moving more slowly with a mobility device.  
*We are unsure of the circumstances of this, however, can confirm clinicians would not commence treatment without the parent present. The corridor is long and narrow and a fire exit making walking up the corridor in groups difficult.*
- There is limited damp in two areas of the practice - one area in reception & one in the downstairs hallway - we have been trying pre and post your visit to get this resolved with the landlord.
- Patient Feedback
  - We have a policy in place for missed appointments and it is practice process that a patient would be informed.
  - Moving buildings requires extensive investment, consultation with and agreement from the NHS and in-depth consultation with patients. Unfortunately, despite the challenges with the current site, moving buildings is not currently in scope.

- The practice did have to cancel some patients due to a dentist leaving, however, the practice have now recruited to capacity so this is no longer an issue.
- Practice challenges (staff feedback)
  - The Practice Manager wants to clarify that this was discussed in the wider context of dentistry across the UK, not specific to any challenges faced by this particular practice.
  - The Practice Manager would like to clarify that there is no apprehension to take on new patients. The practice will continue to take on new NHS patients as and when capacity allows.

#### In response to the recommendations

- When capacity allows, look to take on patients from the central NHS waiting list to ensure fair access.
- The practice will continue to take on new patients from the central NHS waiting list when capacity 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 have personally provided historical feedback to NHS digital regarding this website, but mydentist can't further influence any wording used on this NHS website.
- The NHS website will display the entity/partnership name(s).
- Place NHS cost information in a more prominent position in the waiting room. This information is displayed on the table in the waiting room, on the wall of the reception desk and on the top of the reception desk.
- There was a previous clock there that had been moved to a different location due to previous reconstruction. Since your visit we have put a new clock up in the waiting room.
- Regrettably we are unable to install either a stair lift or a lift. We are aware that the building has its challenges and have adapted it as much as we possibly can. The practice does offer assistance to patients with mobility issues where possible. See comment above re considerations & implications re moving buildings.

**Contact us:**

**Healthwatch Cornwall, Suite 1, Calenick House, Heron Way, Newham, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 2XN**

☎ 0800 038 1281

✉ [enquires@healthwatchcornwall.co.uk](mailto:enquires@healthwatchcornwall.co.uk)

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