Access to NHS Dental Services

A report by Healthwatch Liverpool’s Access to NHS Dental Services Task and Finish Group

December 2014
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1. Introduction - why this Task and Finish work?

This report is the result of a piece of Task and Finish work carried out by a small group of Healthwatch volunteers and staff between July and December 2014.

The topic, Access to NHS Dental Services, was chosen because Healthwatch Liverpool received a substantial number of enquiries about NHS dental care from members of the public, including people who were trying to find a NHS dentist in their area in order to access either routine or emergency dental care.

As the number of enquiries was significant (please see Appendix I), and other information sources such as NHS Choices did not appear to be consistently updated, Healthwatch Liverpool’s Information team carried out a mapping exercise. Liverpool dentists were contacted to ask if they:

a) accepted new NHS patients, and
b) what the waiting time was to get a routine check-up appointment. Results from the mapping exercise showed that certain parts of Liverpool were better served than others; however, if people were able to travel, then there appeared to be enough NHS dental provision in Liverpool overall.

Over time, it was clear that this was not a static picture; for example, changes in waiting times for routine appointments were observed at individual dentist practices.

In response to the large number of enquiries Healthwatch Liverpool received from members of the public about finding emergency dental care, Healthwatch produced a card with both preventative and emergency information (please see Appendix III). Additionally, it was decided that this was a topic that warranted further investigation via Task and Finish work. To assist with this, a patient questionnaire was devised and distributed widely, and two informal public drop-in events organised.

Healthwatch Liverpool also carried out an announced Enter and View visit at the Dental Hospital, and the Group posed some questions to NHS Commissioners responsible for Merseyside about dental access, with the responses referred to in this report.

What follows is the result of the Task and Finish work.
2. What is Healthwatch

Healthwatch Liverpool was established under The Health and Social Care Act 2012 and came into being in April 2013. Healthwatch Liverpool provides an opportunity for citizens and communities to have a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided within their area.

Healthwatch Liverpool enables people to share their views and concerns about local health and social care services and to understand that their contribution will help build a picture of where services are doing well, and where they can be improved.

Healthwatch Liverpool is able to alert Healthwatch England to concerns about specific care providers.

Healthwatch Liverpool also provides people with information about their choices and what to do when things go wrong; this includes signposting people to the relevant provider, and supporting individuals who want to complain about NHS services.

Healthwatch Liverpool provides authoritative, evidence-based feedback with informed recommendations to organisations responsible for commissioning or delivering local health and social care services.

3. Methodologies

Healthwatch Liverpool aimed to get more patient feedback about access to NHS dental services in Liverpool to find out where provision and access to services appeared to be working well, and where there might be gaps in provision or where access was not as easy.

A patient questionnaire was distributed, with a total of 62 completed responses received. As this is a relatively small sample, Healthwatch Liverpool feels it cannot draw too many conclusions from the responses. However, some of the feedback can be used to illustrate some of the perceived issues around access, and the collated results are displayed below.

The group also decided to organise two open ‘drop-in’ events to provide an opportunity for anyone interested to get information about NHS dental services, to give feedback about dental services, and to ask questions of NHS commissioners. One event was organised in Fazakerley with support from the Fazakerley Health forum, as from the mapping exercise carried out by Healthwatch Liverpool it was apparent that there was a lack of NHS dental provision in that particular area.
Another drop-in was organised at the Health Information Centre in The Beat, in the centre of Liverpool, with support from Liverpool Community Health, the current provider of community dental services in Liverpool. NHS commissioners were invited and attended both events, and staff from the Community Dental team as well as the Chair of the Local Dental Network attended the event at the Health Information Centre. At the events feedback was received from 28 people in total. When combined with the responses from the questionnaires, 90 individuals provided feedback for this Task and Finish work.

In September 2014 Healthwatch carried out an announced Enter and View visit to the Dental Hospital, in order to find out more about the work that is carried out there. The full Enter and View report can be found on the Healthwatch website (for further information see below). Additionally, a list of questions compiled by the Group was sent to NHS England commissioners. The response received helped to inform some of the recommendations in this report.

4. The patient experience

4.1 Patient questionnaires - the results

Below follow the collated responses from the 62 completed questionnaires that were returned to Healthwatch. Please note that not everyone answered all the questions, therefore the total number of answers received per question may not be 62.

Q1. Do you have access to a regular Dental Practice?

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
- My local Dentist closed (Longmoor Lane).
- Not registered at any Dentist, don't know how to.
- I don't have one at the moment.
- No Dentist within L10 postcode.
- Haven't been since 19 + had to pay.
- No nearby practice.

Q2. If Yes is your dental practice NHS or Private?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
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</table>

Q3a. Do you use emergency services instead?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3b. Were they easy to access?

Yes  2
No   4

Q3c. If no, what was the problem?

- Bus routes and times available.
- Filling went, not need.
- The appointment system is months long and I never get to the appt.
- Not many appts.
- Cost of travel
- Drilled a tooth that did not need (it?)

Q4. When was the last time you visited a Dentist?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within last 6 months</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing the last time the respondent visited a dental practice.]

Q5a. Did they examine your mouth, teeth and gums

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5b. Did they explain your treatment options?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5c. Did they explain the cost of both NHS/Private?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5d. Did they provide a written dental plan?
- Yes: 13
- No: 34
- Don't know: 6
- Total: 53

Q5e. Did they provide information on changes to Dental Services?
- Yes: 7
- No: 39
- Don't know: 6
- Total: 52
Q5f. Did they discuss how often you need to visit?

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6. How do you travel to your Practice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Method</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Car</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend relative Carer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus/train</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Distance</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7a. How easy is it to get an appointment?
Straight away if it’s urgent:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Car</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend relative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus/train</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Distance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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Q7b. How easy is it to get regular, timely and set check-ups?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How easy is it to get an appointment?
Straight away if it is urgent:

- Yes: 76%
- No: 22%
- Average: 2%
Q7c. How easy is it for you to get appointments within a couple of days?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Q7d. If other, please explain

- Fit in to suit me.
- If in pain then the next day.
- Never had to request an emergency appointment so don't know.
- If you need an appointment they tell you have to wait about a month.
- I will not easy appointment unless I have been within the last six months.
- My experience is that the dentist usually just tells you the cost and when to make an appointment rather than have a discussion with you about it.
- Whenever they can fit you in.
• Unsure regarding question as I've never needed to request an appointment within a couple of days.
• I have only been with the practice approximately 1 year after having a bad experience with my previous practice (Abercromby) & deciding to change. During the time before I registered with Woolton Dental Practice, I used the dental access centre twice which was excellent.

Q8. Any other comments on access to dental services?

• When my Dentist closed, I didn't receive any information regarding Dentist which was taking new NHS patients on. Don't know how to start looking.
• Fear of Dentists!
• Fazakerley needs a Dentist that takes NHS and is within the L10 postcode, (has) leaflets available to explain the cost of both NHS/Private, written dental plans and information on changes to Dental services.
• Was very good, introduced by friend and was given appointment in 3 days.
• Access is not the problem, it's the cost that's out of reach.
• Find my dentist to be very efficient if urgent appointment needed.
• It's quite a distance from where I live as we moved to a new address and it was the closest we could find, but they have no afternoon dentist so this makes things difficult as I have a ten year old daughter which means taking her out of school for an appointment. Rather inconvenient.
• Not great access for people who are wheelchair users.
• Our Dentists' practice on the corner of Queen’s Drive + Muirhead Ave is very good, but it took us a long time to find one that would take us on NHS.
• I travel to my practice because they had spaces for NHS patients at the time. There are now closer NHS dentists to my home but I don't feel the need to move since I am happy with their service.
• My Dentist is Dr XX at Smithdown Dental Practice/Pure Dental/Lovesmile - They're brilliant there.
• My only concern as I use NHS service only was their focus for a period of trying to sell me private dental services. Once I explained I wasn't interested, they stopped.
• No comments
• You need to get appointment, minimum waiting period approx. 1 week.
• No
• My practice is Menlove Ave and I've never had a problem with them.
• Dental care is getting too expensive.
• My Dentist seems to be in a hurry all the time. One occasion I jerked while he was cleaning my teeth. I jerked because of pain he asked me not to jerk again otherwise he will not finish it. Then I jerked the second time. He put down his tools and sent me out. So he is not the practice for me.
• How easy is it for you to get an appointment- straight away if it’s urgent "Don't know haven't had to have an urgent appt".
• Same with payment the receptionist just tells you what they want you to pay, no discussion.
• No I have no problem accessing my practice.
Unsatisfactory.
As a family even when we have moved house we have maintained the same dental practice. Also having a child with a major cardiac problem, oral hygiene is a must. Both children are now young women without having fillings or invasive treatment. We are very happy with the care we get from our dental practice.

*How easy is it for you to get an appointment* "v good".
Not sure who I am meant to fill this form in for. I have filled it in for myself, not on behalf of my disabled child. Form does not say who it is for. Hope this is OK.
A lot of dentists now are forcing the patients to go private as they say the NHS cannot provide the care they want to give. Due to this and as I have no wish to change my dentist I am forced to pay £24.00 per month, I feel this is totally unfair as I pay National Insurance and have done all my working life, I am 56.
The dental clinic I went to last appeared to strongly encourage patients to go private for easier access - I don't know if this is common practice.

Conclusions from the questionnaires

As mentioned previously, 62 questionnaires is a relatively small sample to draw conclusions from. The replies and comments show that experiences are varied, both positive and negative. The majority of respondents did see an NHS dentist, and nearly half had visited a dentist in the past 6 months. However, 12 people said they had not visited a dentist for at least 2 years.

When visiting a dentist, 47 patients said they had their mouth, teeth and gums examined and had treatment options explained to them. However, 34 said they had not been provided with a written dental plan, and 26 had not had the costs explained while 39 had not been provided with information about changes to dental services. 33 Patients had discussed the frequency of visits with their dentist.

A majority of 31 found it easy to get an urgent appointment, and 30 found it easy to get a regular check-up appointment. While some respondents mentioned they don’t know where to find a NHS dentist, or took a while to find one, most of those who booked an appointment appeared to be fairly satisfied with access to the dentist.

While in the comments 8 people provided positive feedback about their dental practice, 3 respondents commented that they felt pressured by their dentists to ‘go private’. Other issues mentioned were the wait for an appointment, and barriers to seeking appointments like having a fear of dentists, or the costs involved. One respondent mentioned their dentist wasn’t easily accessible for wheelchair users.
4.2 The focus groups - results

Two focus groups / drop-ins were held, the first in Fazakerley which was organised with support from the Fazakerley Community Health Federation. Feedback was received from 18 people. At the Health information Centre drop-in, organised with support from Liverpool Community Health, Healthwatch spoke with 10 people about dental issues.

Again, patient’s experiences varied. Whilst seven people gave positive feedback, with dental staff being praised and people commenting they always received reminders for their appointments, 5 patients fed back that the quality of work they had received had not been satisfactory.

Three people identified cost as a barrier to visiting a dentist, and three more said there was no dentist locally or they didn’t know where to find one. A couple of people commented they had a long wait to get an appointment at their usual dentist.

A couple of people were not sure what was available on the NHS, and two more said their dentist had encouraged or in one case pressurised them to get private treatment. Several people said the dentists at the practice they attend were changing regularly, so there was no continuity.

Some people assumed that as they had full dentures there was no need for them to go and see a dentist. Of those with dentures, several had experienced difficulties getting a good fit, and 2 people fed back they had been told it was because they were ‘National Health teeth’ and for something better they should go private.

The individual feedback from Fazakerley included:

- I haven’t got a dentist, I’ve got dentures. If I would go to a dentist I’d go to the one in Netherton by the fire station, where I used to go - my son goes there.
- I used to go to Caldy Road, not sure if they’re still there.
- My dentist is in Netherton, he’s good. They send reminders for check-ups, and the receptionists will get me an appointment right away. There is another dentist now, the old one left. I’d like to go with the new one who’s there now.
- I’m with Mr XX, on Muirhead Avenue, for 40-odd years. He is smashing, I’m frightened in case he retires. His staff explain about the costs. They do have a wait at the appointment, but he’s good. They’ve got a notice up saying it could be up to 2 hours wait.
- My dentist is at Queens Drive, facing St Andrew’s Church. I’ve been with them for 10 years, and they are really nice. They make you feel welcome, they give you a drink, they put staff in to hold your hand if
you’re nervous, and they give you a sticker. They give me a phone call for check-ups. I also got an appointment at the Dental hospital the day after the referral, I only waited 10 minutes and they were really kind too. I needed fillings, extractions and gum surgery.

- The dentist was at Longmoor Lane, but the practice moved to Aintree. I’ve been there years, no problem with them. I will go back.
- Atlantic - Croxteth Hall Lane: Appointment cancelled and not informed (they maintain they left voicemail). Gave waiting time for another appointment as 6 weeks, but when pressed gave one in 3 days! Reception staff very unhelpful.
- My 28-year old son has a learning disability. He had day-dental treatment in Aintree hospital, and developed a post-operative infection. He was in a lot of pain, took one week to get a dental appointment with his regular dentist (Rice Lane).
- I’m working but dental treatment is too expensive so I only go if in very bad pain.
- The dentist in Broadway is very good, I’ve been going there nearly 15 years.
- Since my son turned 18 he hasn’t been to a dentist, as he now has to pay. He is working, and 22 now.
- I’m with Sheil Road dentists, one dentist has left, and now I have Dr XX, he’s lovely. I don’t pay, I get incapacity benefit. My wife and daughter go there too. The dentists phone and give a reminder for an appointment.
- I’m 77, and still paying for my dentist. I thought the dentist is good, but can’t see the dentist I want to.
- I don’t have a dentist, I’m terrified of them. If in pain, I put up with it. There’s no dentist around here anyway, Walton Vale is the nearest. If you can find a dentist who understands you, that helps.
- I’ve been at the dentist at Rice Lane for years, and am happy with the service. It takes a couple of days to get an appointment, same day if it’s an emergency.
- The dentist in Rice Lane went private, and encouraged me to take a ‘plan’. It was too expensive. I was given a list and chose Queens Drive, but it’s difficult to get to, I use the bus. It’s great for appointments. Now the Rice Lane dentist or an associate has a sign saying they take NHS patients!!
- There are no dentists in the L10 area.

Comments and questions at the Health Information Centre included:

- My dentist appears to pressurise people to take out this ‘Denplan’. My son took it, but is worried about being able to afford this.
63 Walton Road dental practice. Excellent dentist. Would however like a second opinion on treatment that has been recommended (NHS patient). There's a frequent change of dentists, so no continuity.

Haggerston Road/ Queens Drive. Toothache. Given antibiotics for abscess. Made appointment after the course was completed - dentist didn’t recall what she had planned to do and had no records. Given 2 small fillings, another tooth that was loose she was unable to tighten - it fell out shortly after. Was told all top teeth needed to be removed. Patient was horrified by appearance of NHS denture. Feels that no alternatives were given (A dental practitioner present at the drop-in advised X-rays were usually given before such advice).

My dental practice broke two teeth but did not want to take them out. I ended up being referred to the dental hospital where they did get removed.

Park Road dental practice - lots of dentists, they come and go, sometimes you don’t see the same dentist twice. I got 4 impressions done (for dentures), and another one done by a different dentist, and none were good. I’m still wearing my old dentures.

I wanted to know what’s available on the NHS because my dentists in Park Road L8 never told me.

Dentist on Queens Drive near Walton Hall Avenue, near the crossing. Two years ago I got new dentures, the old dentures were wearing out and split. The dentist took an impression, but I then had to go to another dentist near the Royal because they were way too big. I complained to the first dentist but was told “these are the National Health teeth”.

My filling came out after 2 days; is something different being used for fillings, or is it a training issue?

Is there a fixed NHS charge for dentures? How much are the dentists and technicians getting paid for the dentures? People don’t have the information about the charges on the NHS. Rubbish dentures are made on the NHS, and then people are told that if you want something better you’ll have to go private.

My son is on the waiting list for a dentist in Norris Green, there’s a 2-month wait for an appointment at his parents’ dentist. He doesn’t have a dentist.
5. Dental Hospital Enter and View visit

Healthwatch Liverpool carried out an announced Enter and View visit to the Liverpool Dental Hospital on the 16th September. A report with recommendations was completed after the visit, which can be found here: http://www.healthwatchliverpool.co.uk/sites/default/files/report_dental_hospital_ev_sep_14_final_pdf.pdf

Some of the issues raised by Dental Hospital staff during the visit were about prevention, ensuring that public knowledge about oral health is increased, and that children are made familiar with visiting a dentist from a young age.

Access to the Dental Hospital was also raised as an issue, partly because there are misconceptions about what the Dental Hospital can and can’t provide, and partly because there is a lack of clarity amongst patients about what qualifies as a dental emergency.

Staff also told Healthwatch representatives that some referrals by dentists to the Dental Hospital are not appropriate, which can lead to patients being left without treatment, for example referrals for root-canal treatment will often be referred back to the dental practice as the practice should in most cases be able to treat the patient. The Dental Hospital has noticed an increase in referrals from dentists between January and March. The reasons for this may be linked to dental practice budgets, not necessary clinical need.

As a result of the Enter and View visit, Healthwatch Liverpool made the following recommendations:

a) Healthwatch Liverpool recommends that NHS England as the current commissioners of Health Visiting services investigates if it is feasible to provide training to Health Visitors about oral and dental health so that knowledge about good dental care is spread.

b) Additionally, that NHS England investigates if investing in mobile ‘baby and toddler dental clinics’, possibly at Sure Start centres and nurseries, would be a valuable addition to promoting good oral health and removing fear of dentists.

c) NHS England to work with the Dental Hospital to monitor if there are patterns of particular dental practices referring more patients to the Dental Hospital, and if so look at ways to see if there is a training need, or other way to address this.

d) That the Dental Hospital monitors the apparent spike of dentists’ referrals to the Dental Hospital between January - March, and if this does not already happen provides a report with analysis to Commissioners so that the latter can take account of spikes in demand in future commissioning decisions.
Healthwatch Liverpool sent the Enter and View report to the Dental Hospital and NHS commissioners for the Merseyside area, and is expecting a response in January, which will be published on the Healthwatch Liverpool website.

6. NHS England responses to questions asked by the T&F Group

The Group sent a number of questions to NHS England. Responses were as follows:

Q1. Does NHS England have a general ‘dental profile’ for Liverpool?
A1. At present there is no dental profile, we do have information regarding practices but a more detailed needs analysis is required.

Q2. Are there plans for improving Liverpool’s rate for the uptake in dental check-ups? If so, what are they?
A2. There are no plans to attempt to improve up take of dental check-ups at present. There has been work done in the past in relation to this that proved to be unsuccessful. The local population are either already regular attenders or prefer to only attend when necessary.

Q3. Does dental access get monitored by NHS England, e.g. whether dentists send out reminders for check-ups, if interpreting services are made available, and physical access to dentist’s premises?
A3. Patients are no longer registered with dental practices, this was legislation introduced in 2006, so there is no contractual channel to make practices re-call patients. However, most practices do still operate a recall system and this can be seen through data regarding access to practices. Quarterly data is also assessed to see which practices are accepting new patients. Interpreter services are available to dental practitioners for patients requiring this service.

Q4. Is information available about current waiting times in Liverpool for specialist dental treatment? What is an acceptable waiting time, is there a standard?
A. Secondary Care providers are bound by the 18 week rule for referral to treatment. Other specialist services don’t have specific targets. A reasonable time to wait is a subjective question but waits do vary depending on the particular service.

Q5. Is there any provision for hospital in-patients who need dental care, including dentures? Is there a pathway for that?
A. There isn’t currently a pathway for in-patients to gain access to dental care other than where certain heart procedures are required and an oral health assessment needs to take place prior to surgery. If dentures are lost in the hospital setting the relevant hospital should make arrangements for this to be addressed.

Q6. Similarly, is there a pathway for dental treatment for people living in care and/or nursing homes? Do the community dentists go to care homes, is that in their remit?
A. There isn’t a pathway for care, however, there are a number of domiciliary providers to patients homes and nursing/care homes. It should be noted though that the best place for care is in the dental practice as facilities in homes is poor.

Q7. Does NHS England monitor the number of referrals individual dental practices make to the Dental Hospital? If so, does NHSE look for patterns in this, e.g. a rise in referrals between January and March, or a particular practice making a high volume of referrals for root canal treatment?
A. NHS England, Merseyside doesn’t monitor referrals. The hospitals would do this themselves and inform the Area Team if there were any patterns becoming noticeable. NHS England, Merseyside could then address the individuals with concerns.

7. Conclusion

This Task and Finish work was set up as a result of public feedback and enquiries that Healthwatch Liverpool has received since it was set up in April 2013. An illustration of this feedback is provided by the report covering the period between April and October 2014 (Appendix I).

For this Task and Finish work, Healthwatch Liverpool received additional feedback from 90 people about access to NHS dental services via questionnaires and two drop-in events. This is a relatively small sample, and while not of significant statistical importance, it does illustrate some of the issues faced by patients when trying to access NHS dental care.

The public feedback and comments showed that experiences of dental access and treatment were varied. Alongside positive feedback several barriers were identified in accessing dental care, including the cost of check-ups and treatment, not having a NHS dentist locally (particularly in the Fazakerley area), or not knowing where to find one. Lack of knowledge about NHS dental services played a role, and a few people mentioned fear of dentists as a barrier. One person fed back that their local dentist premises were not wheelchair accessible.

However, most people who contributed feedback did have access to a NHS dentist, even though a few respondents mentioned feeling either encouraged or pressurised by their dentist to ‘go private’. Of those who visited a dentist the majority had an examination and their treatment options explained to them, although a written treatment plan wasn’t always provided and costs were not always explained. Most of those who booked an appointment were satisfied they could access a dentist for an urgent appointment or a regular check-up, although a few people fed back there were long waits for appointments at their usual dentist.

A few respondents said they did not visit a dentist because they had full dentures, and did not think they needed to. Several patients fed back they had had problems
getting dentures that fitted properly, and two people were told by dental practitioners this was because they were NHS dentures.

During Healthwatch’s Enter and View visit to the Dental Hospital staff fed back that there appeared to be a lack of clarity about what services the Dental Hospital provides. Staff also said that some patients are not clear about what is, and isn’t, a dental emergency, and where to get appropriate help. The dental hospital receives some inappropriate referrals from dental practices, e.g. for root-canal treatment which should have been dealt with by the dentist. This could lead to the patient being referred back to the dental practice, and a delay in treatment or potentially not being able to access treatment.

Staff at the Dental Hospital also emphasised how important prevention is, to help improve dental health in the population and lower the number of patients who need to access emergency dental care. NHS commissioners and their Public Health colleagues will have a role to play in this.

In response to Healthwatch questions, NHS Commissioners said that a more detailed needs analysis for dental care in Liverpool is needed, although commissioners do have information about dental practices. Healthwatch believes a needs analysis or profile for Liverpool would be beneficial, both in ascertaining where current gaps in provision are, and in future commissioning of dental services for Liverpool.

8. Recommendations

Healthwatch Liverpool recommends:

a) That NHS England Commissioners carry out a detailed needs analysis for NHS dental care in Liverpool so as to ensure future commissioning is done on an informed basis;

b) As part of this analysis, that NHS commissioners consider the level of coverage by NHS dentists in all areas of Liverpool and specifically for the Fazakerley - L10 area, and take steps to improve the situation if necessary;

c) That commissioners and NHS dental care providers work together to promote preventative measures, by encouraging the Liverpool population to go for regular check-ups, including young children and patients with dentures;

d) That commissioners and NHS dental care providers ensure there is clear, accessible and standardised information available and displayed in practices about what dental services are available on the NHS, and what is only provided privately;
e) That commissioners and NHS dental care providers work together to ensure that standardised information about the costs of NHS treatments is widely available, accessible and displayed in practices (NHS Choices has information on the website, but not everyone has access to a computer). For an example of this type of information, please see Appendix III;

f) That when future changes to dental services are planned, public consultations are carried out to increase public awareness and ensure public input to any proposals.
APPENDIX I

Dental Enquiries Report
April – October 2014

Number and source of enquiry

First Quarter April – June 14
The number of enquiries for the first quarter April to June 14 amount to 220 (an average of 14-15 enquiries per week). The 220 dental enquiries constituted 31 % proportion of the overall 710 enquiries, and 29% of the dental enquiries came to use via the dental hospital which had been unable to assist them.

Previously reported 202 dental enquiries with an additional 18 identified after reporting date.

Second Quarter July - September 14
The number of enquiries for the second quarter July to September 14 amount to 336 (an average of 21-22 enquiries per week). The 336 dental enquiries constituted 36 % proportion of the overall 940 enquiries, and 21 % of the dental enquiries came to use via the dental hospital which had been unable to assist them. The increase in dental enquiries during this quarter is due to the LJMU Fresher Fair event in September.

Comparison with previous quarters.
The chart below shows the proportion of information enquiries that related to dental issues in each full quarter to date. The proportion rose to a peak in October-December 2013 and then dropped after agreement with the Dental Hospital of a revised information sheet for them to provide to the patients that they are unable to assist. The slight rise seen so far in the first quarter is expected given the reduced drop-in provision at the dental hospital during the student vacation, and does not approach the volume of dental enquiries of the peak quarters. The increase during the second quarter is due to the LJMU outreach event.
Type of dental enquiry

The chart below breaks down the types of dental enquiry received. The figures do not add up to 100% as many dental enquiries cover several areas – most typically when someone is looking for emergency dental treatment we take the opportunity to encourage them to follow this up with regular check-ups and provide details of high street dental practices.
Examples of the more specialised enquiries

Denture replacement for hospital inpatients

A nurse at a local hospital accidentally disposed of a patient's dentures in a contamination bin. The patient therefore required an impression for a new set of dentures, however the waiting list to be seen in hospital with regards to new dentures is extremely long. As the patient is due for discharge we signposted the patient to the Home Visits Team as a faster solution for denture replacement.

During a recent hospital stay a patient lost their dentures. Being housebound following discharge without dentures and a gastric problem, the patient is unable to eat normally exacerbating their gastric condition. We referred the enquirer to the Home Visits Team for denture replacement.

While in hospital an older patient lost their dentures. On discharge the individual required denture replacement. As and the individual has reasonable mobility, we gave the person choices in local dentists for treatment options.

Root canal treatment

We received an enquiry from a patient of a local practice who required root canal treatment and whose practice had referred them to the Dental Hospital saying that they did not have the expertise on site to do the root canal treatment themselves. There was a lengthy waiting time to the first appointment at which point the root canal treatment was scheduled for some months ahead. The patient was unhappy to wait for this amount of time in dental pain. The Dental Hospital suggested the patient go back to their dental practice, however the practice just re-referred the patient again to the Dental Hospital. There appeared to be a breakdown in communication between the dental practice and the Dental Hospital and the patient felt frustrated and misled and wished to make a complaint. We referred them to Healthwatch Complaints Advocacy. We also liaised with NHS England to seek clarification on where root canal treatment fits as it can fall between general and specialist dental services.
Appendix II

Task and Finish Group participants & acknowledgements

The following Healthwatch volunteers and staff took part in the Access to Dental Services Task and Finish Group:

Edwin Morgan - Chair, Healthwatch Liverpool
Dorcas Akeju OBE - Healthwatch volunteer
Moira McLoughlin - Healthwatch volunteer
David Noon - Healthwatch volunteer
Sarah Thwaites - Healthwatch Liverpool Information Team manager
Inez Bootsgezel - Healthwatch Liverpool Scrutiny support team

The Group wants to thanks the following people and organisations for their support and input:

All those who completed questionnaires and attended the drop-in sessions for their invaluable feedback;
Angie Rogers, Health and Well-being Coordinator, Fazakerley Health Forum
Kirk Benyon, Contracts Officer (Merseyside), NHS England
Paula Murphy, Manager, Health Information Centre
Roger Hollins, Chair of the Local Dental Committee
Staff from the Community Dental Team
Staff at the Dental Hospital
Appendix III

Healthwatch Liverpool dental information cards:

Got a dental emergency?
When you are in severe dental pain, you want help fast...

If you have a regular dentist:
Contact your dentist first. Many dentists will be able to offer their regular patients a speedy appointment in an emergency.

If you do not have a dentist or your dentist is closed contact:
The Dental Access Centre - 0151 300 8349 - Monday to Sunday 9am until 8.30pm. Patients must telephone and leave their details Then a dental nurse will phone back and assess the dental need. If the nurse agrees that an appointment is needed they can often provide same day appointments, either at the Dental Access Centre or at a Liverpool dental practice.
Or
The Dental hospital. During university term time, student dentists at the Dental Hospital can see a limited number of people in dental pain.
Not in dental pain?
Great! Here is how to keep it that way...

- Look after your teeth carefully - Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day using a fluoride toothpaste and cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- Visit the dentist regularly, as often as they recommend

Did you know?
- Most Liverpool dentists take new NHS patients. Call Healthwatch Liverpool on 0300 777 007 for details of NHS dentists in your area.
- For many people NHS dental treatment is free. This includes:
  - Young people under 18 or under 19 and in full-time education,
  - Women who are pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months
  - People in receipt of income based benefits such as Income Support or Pension Credit guarantee credit.
  - People named on a NHS tax credit exemption certificate or HC2 certificate
- If you need to pay for NHS dental treatment, charges are limited to set 'bands’. For example £18.50 for check ups and basic care or £50.50 if you need treatment such as fillings, root canal work or if your dentist needs to take out one or more of your teeth.
- A check up can help you avoid more expensive treatment later - and prevent future dental pain.
- If you are nervous of dentists, there are dentists who specialise in working with nervous patients and will do their best to put you at your ease.

For more information contact
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