

## **JHOSC Briefing Paper – Dental Services**

*The JHOSC requested some further information about Dental Services. In order to provide some background information, the below is an excerpt from a presentation that was received by Camden Council. The JHOSC may decide to request further information.*

Dental services were not permitted to see patients for face to face care at the start of the pandemic and this has led to significant backlog of unmet need, delayed and suspended treatments which is likely to cause a long wait before they are able to see patients for routine treatment.

The context is that NHS General Dental Services are currently operating at significantly reduced capacity due to social distancing and infection prevention and control requirements in light of the COVID-19 pandemic as set out by the Chief Dental Officer for England and Public Health England. This has an impact on the number of patient's practices can see in a single day.

In keeping with other healthcare services, there are considerable backlogs in the provision of primary, secondary and community care dentistry. Provision of urgent care has been maintained whilst there has been a phased approach to the resumption of routine services with triage, consultation and screening arrangement still in place.

The majority of dental practices are now open and able to safely provide a full range of treatments but are having to prioritise patients with highest need or priority including children and those most at risk of oral disease. Dental practices must allow for gaps between patients if they are providing aerosol generated treatments, in order to maintain a safe environment for patients and staff. Ultimately, dentists and their teams are skilled clinicians and they use their clinical judgement to assess and respond to patient need. However, capacity allowing, practices are seeing new patients and information about access to local dental services is available on NHS.UK website.

Currently Primary care practices are working at 60% of their pre-pandemic activity and unfortunately this does mean that access to services is reduced. Practices are working extremely hard to deal with urgent and outstanding courses of treatment and whilst some are in position to offer routine appointments within a reasonable timeframe, this is not uniform across London and therefore it is quite possible that private treatment may be offered as an alternative if the patient wishes to be seen sooner.

However, if a patient needs to see a dentist for Urgent Care (acute pain or facial swelling) the patient should contact NHS 111 where the call will be transferred to the London Dental Triage Service. These services are in operation 24/7 for patients who do not routinely attend a practice, have an urgent need or are unable to find a local practice which has the available capacity. If the triage service assesses that the issue is urgent, an appointment at one of the 39 commissioned urgent dental care centres will be arranged. When assessing patients the triage service will try to

ensure minimal travel but this is dependent on the services and appointments available at the time and may involve some travel.

If a patient is seeking an earlier routine NHS appointment than is currently available, a private appointment maybe offered by the practice, however the patient is not obliged to accept.