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Dear Jo and Chris,

Re: Healthwatch Isle of Wight Dentistry Survey

Thank you for your email dated 8 June 2018, attaching your report outlining the results of a survey of Isle of Wight NHS Dentistry patients undertaken a year ago. The report is helpful to us as commissioners of the service and the results will be used to inform our work going forward. Should HealthWatch wish to undertake any further surveys on NHS dentistry, we would be more than happy to contribute to the questions to help elicit specific problems that we can endeavour to address.

NHS England is supported by the NHS Business Service Authority (NHS BSA) to monitor contractual compliance with NHS Dental practices. Dental practices are also registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who inspects and monitors the premises and quality of clinical care provided. Our contracting and quality teams work closely with these two organisations to identify areas of risk and concern across the whole Wessex area. There are bi-monthly meetings to triangulate information including complaints and safety concerns and action is taken where risks and concerns are identified.

Over the last 12 months, our contracting team have been working closely with NHS dental practices on the Isle of Wight who have given cause for concern to manage the contractual requirements robustly. Together with commissioning decisions that have been made as a result of contract changes, we are confident that provision and quality of dental services will continue to improve in order to meet the needs of the Isle of Wight population. Additional general dental activity has recently been procured and two Isle of Wight practices are now in a position to offer more activity than they were previously able to. In addition, we have made arrangements so that all dental practices are given the option of delivering extra activity subject to meeting specific criteria that includes keeping their NHS Choices profile up to date.

We have commissioned some optional services from dentists over the last 12 months and it has been encouraging that uptake from dental contractors on the Isle of Wight has been good. These services address the needs of specific groups of people – homeless people, children under 5 and patients in care homes.

You may be aware that notice was given earlier this year by one contractor on the Isle of Wight to terminate contracts early for general dentistry, orthodontics, urgent care and special care. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that every effort is being made to ensure the level of service is not impaired and to ensure a seamless transfer of care to other providers, wherever possible.

Having examined the report carefully, the comments on each section are as follows:

Access & Support

- We are aware that there are fluctuations accessing an NHS dentist. There are currently five practices on the Isle of Wight taking on new patients. We would encourage the public to use the NHS Choices website to identify which practices are currently taking on new patients. Individual practices are responsible for ensuring the information is up to date on NHS Choices and it is in their interests to do so. The other option is to phone NHS England's Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 2233 or the local dental helpline provided by 111.
- The majority of respondents found it easy to travel to their dentist. This is encouraging and evidences that we have endeavoured to secure services in areas that the population can easily access. However, it would be helpful to know if there are particular geographical pockets where patients are experiencing problems so that this can be taken into account for future assessment.
- There were some respondents who found it difficult to move around in the surgery. Dental practices are required to meet the reasonable needs of their patients. The patient leaflet must outline whether practice premises have suitable access for disabled patients and, if not, the alternative arrangements for providing services to such patients. Compliance with these requirements is monitored through contract management and via the CQC. If there are concerns about specific practices, we would be grateful for information about this, so that we can follow up specifically with practices.
- There was a question about supporting specific needs. The comments that follow this section give a flavour of what some of these needs might be and we can ensure these themes are followed up in our general communications with contractors. If there are specific concerns, they should be raised in the first instance with the practice, but we are happy to follow up unresolved issues with practices if we are made aware of them.

Appointment Handling

- The majority of respondents seem positive about the handling of appointments. We do know that some practices have limited availability due to national workforce challenges. It is worth noting that practices can suffer from 'lost' appointments due to patients failing to attend and not notifying the practice. If this happens on a regular basis, the practice has the right to refuse booking further appointments for that particular patient. This may appear negative to some but 'fail to attends' impact heavily on the dentist's time and is costly to the NHS.
- For urgent appointments, arrangements are in place for referral through NHS111 and we ensure that additional capacity is commissioned if needed over bank holiday periods. For those patients who did not find the process easy, it would be interesting to understand how they accessed the service and whether the information provided could be improved.

- It is good to see that the NHS 111 service received positive feedback and we will share this with them.

Receiving Dental Treatment

- This section provides helpful qualitative information. As outlined at the beginning of this letter, the quality of dental services is continuously considered through the Dental Quality Review meetings which are attended by multiple organisations and NHS England departments – we will examine the results through this group with a view to providing some specific commentary for continuous improvement to the dental contractors on the Isle of Wight.

Cost

- Dental practices are required to display information about costs in a prominent position. This is a contractual requirement and, if we are made aware of practices where this is not the case, we can follow this up specifically. There are 3 bands of NHS dental treatment:

Band 1 = £21.60

Band 2 = £59.10

Band 3 = £256.50

These costs are not set by individual practices and they are obliged to adhere to these charges. Under the terms of the national contractual arrangements, practices are not required to offer flexible payment options and they are entitled to ask for payment of treatment upfront.

Specialist Treatment

- Depending on the speciality required, there are different referral processes in place. It is therefore difficult to comment on the questions in this section. This is a complex area and we know patients need very special and individual care. The comments you have included as part of this section are encouraging and positive.

Thank you again for sharing the report and for focussing on NHS dental care. We are pleased to see positive responses, but we also acknowledge areas for improvement.

Yours sincerely,



Olivia Falgayrac-Jones
Director of Commissioning