

Unscheduled Dental Care Services in the South East

Early engagement questionnaire memorandum of information

Background

Unscheduled Dental Care (UDC) services, more often known as Emergency Dental Services (EDS), encompass all urgent dental need whether in-hours or out-of-hours. The services currently in place are legacy arrangements inherited by NHS England and NHS Improvement from the former Primary Care Trusts. As a result, the services offered across the South East region are inconsistent.

It is the aim of this re-commissioning programme to standardise the services on offer as much as possible across the entire South East region as well as enable significantly more patients to be able to access UDC services and increase efficiency overall.

Current services

There is inconsistency of provision across the South East currently. There is predominantly only out of hours face to face care available, ranging from 365 days per year in some areas to weekends and bank holidays only in others. In-hours care is available in some locations but in nowhere near enough to satisfy demand.

Advice services are similarly variable. One area has a full dental clinical assessment service (DenCAS), some access signposting information via NHS111 or a local helpdesk arrangement. One area has a booking service for out of hours face to face appointments, however this is on a first-come-first-served basis and not subject to a clinical triage.

Proposed changes

The NHS England and NHS Improvement [Commissioning Standard for Urgent Dental Care](#) sets out the parameters within which local commissioning teams will develop UDC services when they are re-commissioned. There is a focus on providing accessible advice to patients in pain using NHS111 and providing face to face appointments where clinically indicated.

This re-commissioning programme focuses on three areas: a DenCAS, face to face in-hours appointments, and face to face out-of-hours appointments.

The DenCAS will be first point of contact for patients calling NHS111 with a dental query. It will provide general advice about dental treatment and charges as well as a signposting service to local dental practices and which are accepting new NHS patients, as well as clinical advice ranging from routine queries to those patients in dental pain. It is envisaged that this service will be available ideally 24 hours per day 7 days per week, or at a minimum 7am to 10pm 7 days per week.

When patients call with dental pain the DenCAS will undertake a triage assessment of the patient to determine whether a face to face appointment is appropriate. Historically, any patient with an urgent need has had an appointment to see a dentist, however this results in a high proportion of appointments where only a prescription is issued or advice given and no actual treatment takes place; this means that many patients in need of treatment are unable to access it. Moving these types of appointment to the DenCAS will lead to a much more efficient service.

The new service will be clinically-led which will enable it to provide the same level of professional advice that would be received at a face to face appointment. It will also be able to issue prescriptions for antibiotics remotely where clinically indicated and appropriate following a video appointment for patients to collect from their local pharmacy.

Where a face to face appointment is indicated following triage, the DenCAS will be able to direct book the patient into a suitable appointment. One significant change is anticipated to be a move away from evening face to face appointments in favour of daytime in-hours appointments. This offers many advantages, including:

- it is preferable to carry out certain treatments, for example extractions, during the day due to the small risk of haemorrhage;
- in-hours is more cost effective than out-of-hours therefore it will be possible to offer more appointments;
- it will be possible to offer more locations for face to face appointments which will be more convenient for patients;
- an increasing number of dentists no longer wish to work into the evenings which is leading to increased difficulty in staffing evening sessions, therefore moving to in-hours will overcome this.

Out-of-hours face to face appointments will remain at weekends and on bank holidays which means that face to face appointments are available 365 days per year.

Finance

It is anticipated that the cost of these changes will come from existing budgets already committed to UDC services. There will be no financial saving in removing weekday evening face to face appointments as this funding will be used to commission a greater number of in-hours weekday appointments.

No decision has been made on sessional payments. Various funding models are being explored which will be informed by the information gathered as part of this questionnaire and other stakeholder engagement.

Mobilisation of services

It is envisaged that a six-month period will be sufficient for mobilisation of UDC services following contract award.