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13<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Jo Ringshall  
Healthwatch Worcestershire  
Civic Centre  
Queen Elizabeth Drive  
Persore  
WR10 1PT

Dear Jo,

**RE: Healthwatch Worcestershire - Going to the Dentist (Final Report) – NHS England Response**

Thank you for forwarding the Final Report.

We have reviewed the final report and are pleased to learn that most of the people Healthwatch spoke to as part of the process are going to the dentist regularly, have confidence and trust in their dentist and rate their treatment as good or very good.

We note that report has identified several areas for improvement, such as cost, lack of information, confusion over charging, fear, and in some cases difficulty finding an NHS dentist locally.

Having reviewed the recommendations, we enclose our response to the recommendations in Appendix 1.

As a commissioner, we further note the recommendations for all *Providers of Local Services* across West Midlands, not just Worcestershire.

If we can be of any further assistance, do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

**Martina Ellery**  
**Deputy Head of Commissioning**  
**NHS England – West Midlands**

## Appendix 1 – Recommendations for NHS England

- 1) *NHS England should consider whether there are ways in which they can assist local dental service providers to implement the recommendations above.*

NHS England (West Midlands) notes the recommendations for providers of local services and is happy to assist with the implementation of the same.

A number of the recommendations fall under contractual requirements and we are disappointed to learn that some respondents found practices not compliant with their obligations.

To assist with implementation of the recommendations, we will ensure that a summary is shared with dental providers via our next quarterly newsletter and at the summer LDC meeting. That will support wider awareness of the issues raised.

We will further promote the report recommendations with dental providers during contract monitoring visits and during mid year and end of year meetings, taking those opportunities to highlight particular areas of challenge identified, such as maintaining up to date information on NHS website and displaying up to date, legislation compliant Complaints Policy and signposting to the Out of Hours services.

We recognise, however, that it is not a contractual or a regulatory requirement to maintain the NHS website although we have raised this as a particular issue.

Where shortcomings are identified against contractual obligations, we will continue to make sure that appropriate contractual action is taken and that any resulting action plans comprehensively address the issue.

We reinforce the requirement to display up to date NHS Charges with contractors on an annual basis at the point of uplift of patient charges (April of each financial year). We will ensure that the wider report recommendations are incorporated into the communication this year, due to be sent out shortly.

We will continue to work with our local Oral Health Steering Group to promote access to dentistry locally and continue to input into the Group's action plan.

NHS England (West Midlands) is pleased to confirm that we are participating in the *Starting Well* initiative supported by the Office of Chief Dental Officer, aimed at expanding access to dentistry for children under 2.

In 2019/20, we will be working with providers to ensure their practices not only encourage taking babies and young children to the dentist but also work with parents and other agencies to disseminate and support consistent oral health messages. The roll out of the programme ties in with the recommendations of the report and includes a range of information and support materials not only for dental practices but also for other agencies and organisations, such as health Visiting teams and Community Pharmacies.

- 2) *NHS England should consider how to raise awareness that NHS dental treatment does not have to be linked to a specific dental practice or in the case of children, to the parent/carers own preferred dental practice.*

NHS England (West Midlands) recognises that the disparity between *registration* with a general Practitioner and *attendance* at a dental practice for a course of treatment causes some confusion amongst patients and the challenge this poses. We are particularly cognisant of the

fact that 'registration' is one of the options currently being considered and tested as part of Dental Contract Reform Programme.

We also recognise that patients build a relationship and loyalty with their dental practices and practitioners. We regularly remind our contractors to use language consistent with the Regulations in any patient communication to ensure that '*registration*' is not utilised and encourage them to take on new patients when capacity permits.

We also work with our Community Service and Out of Hours providers as well as 111 Service to support patients in finding a dental practice best suited to their requirements at the time, recognising they may not always be the ones closest geographically.

We will raise this matter with the Local Dental Committee to seek their view on how best to further raise awareness of the matter.