

Update on NHS General Dental Access County Durham

Durham Health Scrutiny Committee
Meeting of 19 November 2021

NHS England and NHS Improvement



Background/context



- Primary care dental services operate in accordance with the National Dental Regulations and must evidence compliance with General Dental Services Regulations and Dental Charge Regulations.
- A key point of note is that the regulations unlike those for General Medical Practice do not allow for Patient Registration. NHS Dentistry contracts and provision is activity and demand led with the expectation that practices deliver and manage their available commissioned activity to best meet the immediate needs of any patient presenting by entering into an agreed and formal signed course of treatment.
- The contract regulations set out the contract currency which is measured in units of dental activity (UDAs) that are attributable to a 'banded' course of treatment prescribed under the regulations.
- Not all types of Dental Treatment are available on the NHS e.g. Implants
- NHS England do not commission private dental services, private dental practice is regulated by the Care Quality Commission and dentist regulation is undertaken by the General Dental Council

Background/context continued



- National NHS Dentistry Regulation and Contracts do not prohibit the provision of Private Dentistry by Dental Practices
- National NHS Dentistry Regulation does require, where dental practices hold NHS Contracts and offer both NHS/Private dental care, that patients are offered a full and transparent choice of available NHS/Private options to allow patients to make an informed choice of care.
- Health Education England set national strategy regarding numbers and distribution of dentist and dental workforce student numbers and training places and manage and deliver local dentist and dental workforce student training including EU / Overseas dental workforce entry working with Educational Providers e.g. UCLAN, Newcastle University.

General Dental Access provision



- There are 55 dental practices across County Durham contracted to provide general dental access – 821,008 unit of dental activity (UDAs) commissioned.
- In 2019-20 (pre-Covid) approximately 91% of the total commissioned capacity in Durham has been utilised. However, we acknowledge the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on access for patients and would like to provide reassurance that we are working with practices to explore all options available to increase access for patients.
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been one NHS contract handed back within the Durham area. The practice closed on 31 August 2020 when the provider retired.

NHS Dentistry Pressures & Challenges



Dental Workforce – Recruitment & Retention

A significant risk to both sustaining existing or improving levels of NHS Dentistry access and Oral Health is dental workforce recruitment and retention (dentists and more recently dental nurses).

This is a national problem but is creating significant pressures in an increasing number of local North Cumbria and North East localities including Durham.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID Pandemic has created a range of risks and pressures for NHS dentistry that are not too dissimilar to those being faced by the wider NHS.

National Dental COVID Constraints



- NHS dental sector in particular has faced significant challenges during the pandemic due to the proximity between a dental professional and a patient's airways and the relatively high proportion of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) undertaken that increase the likelihood of COVID-19 infection spread.
- To ensure the safety of patients and staff all NHS dental practices are required to comply with a national standard operating procedure and infection prevention control measures, the impact of which has and continues to result in NHS dentistry operating at significantly lower levels of capacity during 2020 and 2021-22 than would normally be available.
- In view of this reduced capacity and in line with the national standard operating procedures, dentists are required to prioritise patients based on clinical need and urgency into their available treatment capacity, ie
 - Patients seeking urgent or emergency dental care.
 - Patients with greatest oral health needs - attending to incomplete care plans and reaching out to high needs dental patients and vulnerable groups most at risk of avoidable dental disease including children.
- This likely means a delay for patients seeking non-clinically urgent and more routine dental care such as check up's.
- Progression to resume the full range of routine dental being risk-managed by individual practices and this position is likely to continue until at least the end of March 2022.

Safely Restoring Access



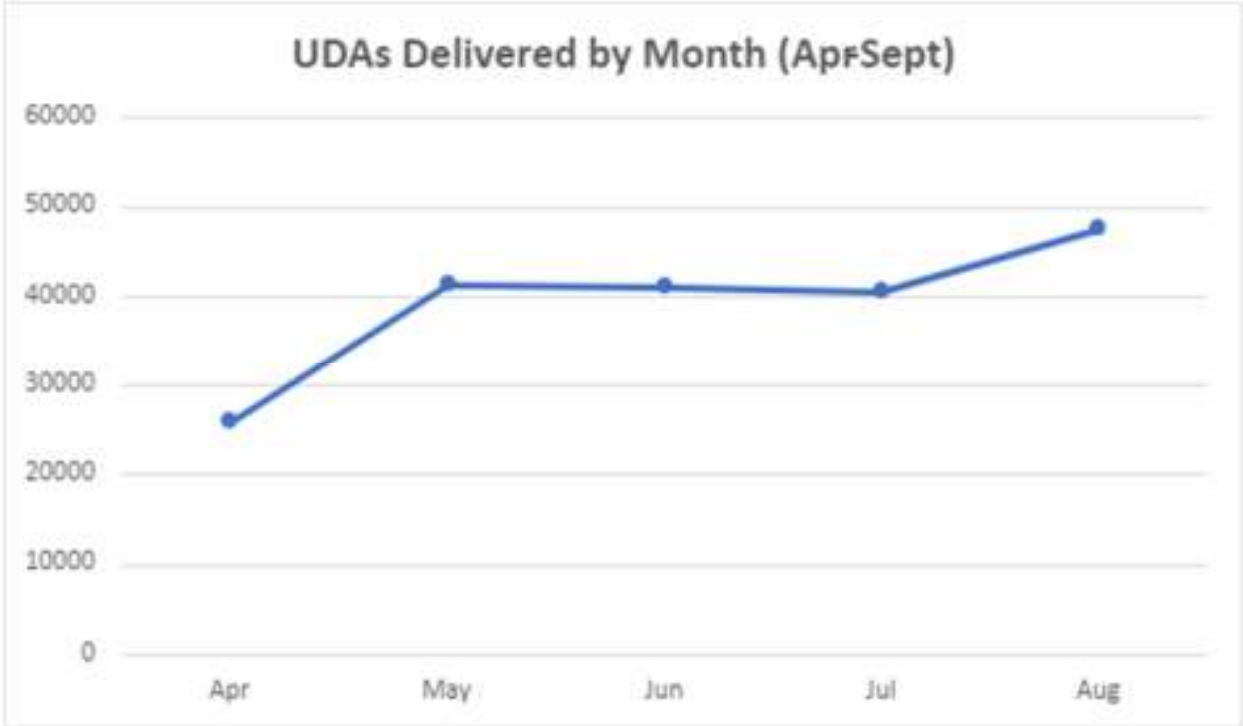
- The contractual arrangements for NHS dentistry through the pandemic have reflected the need to prioritise patient safety, patient access and practice sustainability.
- During the first wave of the pandemic in the interest of patient and dental staff safety, routine dental services were paused and urgent dental care centres (UDCs) were established to provide access to urgent care.
- In the second phase of the response, as infection rates dropped, all practices re-opened for face to face care and have steadily increased activity.
- Practices were required to meet a set of limited conditions in return for income protection, including a requirement to deliver at least 20% of normal activity volumes for the period July to December 2020, increasing to 45% by the end of March 2021.
- From April 2021 the minimum expectation was at least 60% of normal activity volumes by the end of September 2021, increasing to 65% for the period October to end of December 2021.
- Whilst restoration of NHS dental activity continues, a return to full capacity will be dependent on the further easing of COVID-19 infection prevention control measures.
- In the interim work is on-going to explore opportunities to increase the clinical treatment capacity available within the constraints that the practices have to continue to operate.

Local measures/actions to date



- Incentives for ALL NHS dental practices to prioritise patients who have not been seen in the practice within the previous (24 months) adults and 12 months (children) who require urgent dental care to supplement the existing in hours urgent dental care centres commissioned to provide urgent dental care slots on referral via NHS111
- Additional capacity commissioned from the out of hours urgent dental care service from April to the end of August 2021 to provide additional resilience to manage peaks in demand during weekend and bank holiday periods.
- Increased investment into the new Dental Out of Hours Service contract delivered from University Hospital North Durham (from 01 Oct 2021) to ensure we have sustainable capacity available to treat 'clinically confirmed' urgent and emergency patient's that present via NHS 111.
- Investment in additional clinical triage capacity within the out of hours integrated NHS111 North East and North Cumbria Dental Clinical Assessment Service.

Dental Activity trend – County Durham



Note:

- Similar trend to rest of North East and North Cumbria

Access – Next Steps



- Work is underway to commission additional NHS dental capacity to replace the gap from the NHS contract that was handed back in late 2020. Subject to a successful outcome to the local commissioning and procurement process this would provide an annual treatment capacity for circa 4,156 patients (based on historic UDA per patient delivery patterns).
- Continuing to offer incentives to existing practices to prioritise patients who have not been seen in the practice within the previous (24 months) adults and 12 months (children) who require urgent dental care;
- Seeking expressions of interest from practices who have the capacity and capability to deliver additional in-hours access until the end of March 2022 with a focus on urgent care and access for nationally identified high risk groups, ie children.
- Continue to work with all practices to support them to maximise their clinical treatment capacity.
- Engage with Health Education England and their delivery partners in the development of initiatives/opportunities to improve recruitment and retention of dentists and dental team staff.

Summary – key points to note



- All NHS dental practices still operating at significant reduced capacity due to requirement to continue to adhere to national infection control guidance.
- It is therefore necessary for dental practices to triage patients who contact them to ensure that patients with the greatest clinical need, ie those requiring urgent dental care and vulnerable patients are prioritised, which likely means a delay for patients seeking non-clinically urgent and more routine dental care such as check's ups.
- Progression to resume the full range of routine dental care is being risk-managed by individual practices.
- This position is likely to continue until at least end of March 2022.
- All opportunities are being explored to increase the clinical treatment capacity available.
- In the interim we are asking patients for their understanding and co-operation during this unprecedented and difficult time for the NHS.

THANK YOU