

An abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping circles and semi-circles in shades of green, blue, and pink. The largest circle is green on the left, a blue circle is in the center, and a large pink circle is on the right. Smaller circles and semi-circles are scattered around them, creating a dynamic, layered composition.

GP & Dental Access in Harrow

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March 2021

Background

- ❖ The role of Healthwatch is to gather intelligence / evidence, to check and challenge service delivery, identify where services need to change and to make recommendations to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Council and other health and social care providers
- ❖ Access to General Practice's (GP's) and Dental Services is an issue that we are increasingly hearing about, please see our recent report:
<https://www.healthwatchharrow.co.uk/insight-and-reports>
- ❖ There is general awareness of the issues that need to be addressed. Our report was written in the spirit of collaborative working, knowing how hard people are working due to the pandemic but also recognising that patients have the right to access services
- ❖ In summarising the key issues and recommendations we would like to highlight the general concerns raised do not relate to the quality of care that people receive, the issues that need to be addressed relate to accessing services.



Key issues

- ❑ GP Telephone systems and online booking systems are not efficient and do not meet the demands / needs of patients needing to contact the surgery. For those experiencing difficulty with access, over half (58%) cite telephone related issues, while over a third (42%) suggest a problem with online booking. *“ I dread needing to make an appointment to see my doctor”*.
- ❑ Commissioning of NHS Dental Care is not meeting current demand. *“My usual dentist has said I am no longer registered with them and cannot register as an NHS patient at this time.” “NHS practice has now told me that I have to go private.”*
- ❑ The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities are disproportionately affected in accessing services.

Those with Mental Health conditions, Carers, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) respondents and those of working age are disproportionally impacted, in terms of access, confidence across platforms and overall satisfaction.

- ❑ Accessibility is particularly an issue for those patients with language, mental health and learning disabilities.



Recommendations

1. CCG to work with the Primary Care Networks and Harrow GP surgeries to put in place improved, quicker and more accessible phone and online appointment booking systems to reduce patient waiting times and cancelling appointments, and to review the effectiveness of their GP texting service in reducing missed appointments.
2. NHS England to review the commissioning of NHS Dental Care in Harrow, to ensure commissioning is kept up to date with demand and that the dental contract is fit for purpose. For example, one element is the Units of Dental Activity (UDA'S), as each dental practice is commissioned for a set number of UDA's and in Harrow this is not meeting the current demand.
3. Primary Care Networks, GP practices and Dental Surgeries to work collaboratively with the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities to further understand the issues which are affecting these communities in accessing services e.g. language barriers, lack of digital access etc. and to put a plan of action in place to address these issues.
4. CCG to work with the Primary Care Networks and Harrow GP surgeries to improve accessibility particularly for those patients with language, mental health and learning disabilities.



Responses to report:

Clinical Commissioning Group Response:

- The Executive team have agreed that as they support General Practice in their transition back to normal business arrangements, supporting access, particularly telephone access to services, will be a critical component. They will work with Practices to look at what the right capacity and balance of virtual and face to face conversations will be within this.
- The issue of GP access was discussed at a GP Forum, highlighting the findings of the HWH report, and practices were asked to consider the access challenges that patients are facing as part of their recovery plan. Many Practices have highlighted that telephone access has been a significant problem over recent months due to the volume of patients calling with COVID vaccination queries. As a result, the CCG have worked with Harrow Council to promote the Harrow contact centre as a place local people can call with queries about COVID vaccinations.
- Looking at how extended access GP arrangements can support some of the issues that patients are facing. Encouraging Practices to re-engage in using these extended access services for Harrow patients, as well as looking at how they can provide additional access to essential services, such as NHS Health Checks, they may have been paused over the COVID surge period.



Responses to report (continued):

- Where specific issues were highlighted about Practices, this has been shared with them.
- We will continue to keep this as a priority area under review in our discussions with primary care networks and our own Clinical Directors.

NHS England:

- Responded to state the context is that the NHW General Dental Services are currently operating a significantly reduced capacity due to the pandemic and the controls now in place set out by the Chief Dental Officer for England and Public Health England.
- If a patient is seeking an earlier routine NHS appointment than is currently available, a private appointment may be offered by the practice.
- The response did not address the recommendation to ensure commissioning is kept up to date with demand to ensure NHS patients are receiving the service they are entitled to.



Responses to report (continued):

CQC Response:

- They are aware of access concerns continuing across NWL which includes Harrow. It does appear to be largely based around the new remote methodologies implemented at pace.
- They are monitoring this risk in line with other regulation monitoring activity. This includes provider reviews and if required inspection activity.

In summary:

- CCG have responded and are taking steps to address the issue of access to GP Surgeries
- Issues relating to specific GP Practices are being addressed with a plan of action being put in place
- CQC are monitoring
- NHS England have not responded on the issue regarding commissioning not being kept up to date with demand
- Working in partnership we all need to build in improving communications for those communities who suffer from the greatest inequalities.

