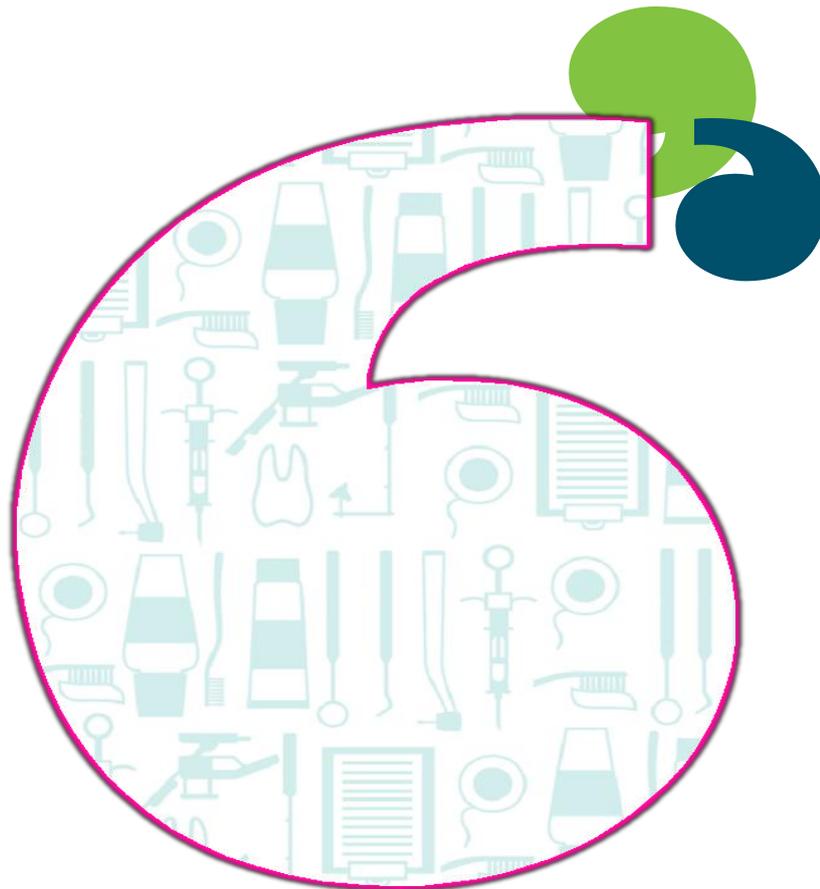


**Access to NHS Dental Services in
Hertfordshire:
Summary of Enter and View Programme
2017-2019
Findings and Self-Audit Checklist**



Published: February 2021

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Why we visited

Following the outcomes of a joint project between Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HwH) and Public Health locally, '[Access to NHS Dental Services in Hertfordshire 2016' report](#), we conducted an Enter and View¹ visiting Programme into a percentage of randomly selected NHS Dental Practices within 5 districts in Hertfordshire.

The focus of the visits was to look at:

- Information Access
- Complaints Handling
- Communication and Support Needs -
- Physical Access
- Environment

The visits also looked at access to dental services for marginalised and socially excluded groups. (How practices make adjustments to accommodate the patient's physical and mental health needs and how they explain NHS treatment costs and the complaints process in line with the NHS Accessible Information Standard).

We worked closely with the Central Region Inspection Manager - Dentistry, at the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The Hertfordshire Local Dental Committee was also informed and has been very supportive of this work. All findings were shared with these stakeholders and NHS England (East of England). The individual reports, recommendations and responses from the dental practices have been published on the Healthwatch Hertfordshire website: [Enter & View Reports - Healthwatch Hertfordshire](#)

What we did

The focus of this project has been on looking at one district at a time, beginning with Welwyn and Hatfield as a pilot area. In this district, 50% of the dental practices with NHS contracts were randomly selected for an Enter and View visit.

These Enter and View visits were 'announced/unannounced' visits, where we notified the practice of our intention to visit within the next 4 weeks but did not give a specific date or time. Authorised HwH representatives² used an observational checklist to record their findings and had specific questions to ask the person on duty at the reception desk.

¹ Local Healthwatch have the legal right to visit places that provide publicly funded health or social care services to find out about people's experiences.

² Our Enter & View staff and volunteers have an Enhanced DBS check and are trained to a high standard.

Desktop research was also carried out on the website of the dental practice and the practice's entry on the NHS website (formerly NHS Choices). The NHS website is one of the key sources of information that NHS England says is available for the public to find a local dentist that is accepting NHS patients and the dentist's own website is another source for patients to find detailed information about the practice and treatments offered. This formed part of the information access audit with recommendations from the audit included in the final report to the dental practice.

At the end of each visit, we produced recommendations based on the findings, and shared this with the practice. Practices responded to each recommendation with actions and commitments.

After each district was completed, findings were reviewed and the observational checklist amended as appropriate.

Following on from our 'pilot' set of visits to the Welwyn and Hatfield district, HwH then conducted announced/unannounced visits to dental practices in the St Albans and Harpenden, East Herts, Stevenage and Watford districts visiting approximately 25% of practices who had an NHS contract.

For our visits to dental practices in Bishop's Stortford, we trained some local volunteers with learning disabilities who participated in the visits to 4 practices in the area. This helped to enrich the feedback around the potential experience of patients with learning disabilities.

About the Visits

The following practices were visited between February 2017 and February 2019:

Welwyn and Hatfield

1. Beehive Dental Practice
2. Church Road Dental Practice
3. Hatfield Dental Centre
4. Ivory Dental Clinic
5. Ivory Dental and Implant Clinic
6. Knightsfield Dental Practice
7. Peartree Dental Clinic

East Herts:

1. Bishop's Stortford Orthodontics
2. Damira Dental Studio
3. Hockerill Dental
4. Hudson's Dental Care

5. The Dentist Bishop's Stortford
6. The Dentist Buntingford

St Albans and Harpenden

1. 21 Dental
2. Gatrad and Associates Dental Care
3. Mr GK Rabin and Associate
4. Hertfordshire Centre for Dentistry
5. The Maltings Dental Surgery
6. Russell Avenue Dental Practice and Implant Centre
7. St Peter's Lodge

Stevenage:

1. Broadwater Dental Practice
2. Chells Dental Practice
3. Shephall Dental Surgery
4. Stevenage Dental Surgery

Watford:

1. Marc Friedmann and Associates
2. Market Street Dental Practice
3. Novocare Dental
4. Watford Dental Practice

Dental practices have welcomed our authorised representatives and responded positively to the recommendations from the visits. These covered the physical environment, signage, complaints handling, patient feedback, information access, communication needs, medical emergencies, promoting oral health and safeguarding.

It was suggested by the Hertfordshire Local Dental Committee that they would welcome a self-audit checklist based on the Enter and View visits so that all dental practices could benefit from the project. A summary of our findings and a checklist follows.

Summary of findings and self-audit Checklist

Information Access

Information available in dental practices covers a number of topics from what it will cost to have your treatment and how to take care of your teeth to policies about complaints, safeguarding and giving feedback.

Waiting rooms can be quite small areas so it is important to give consideration to how information is displayed and promoted, thinking about key messages that patients need to know about. Information should be regularly reviewed to ensure it is up to date and relevant and meets the needs of the practice's patients.

Every practice we visited had an up to date poster providing the NHS Bandings and charges prominently placed in waiting rooms and reception areas if they offered adult NHS services, though practices had not always included them on their website as well. Every practice stated that they explained and discussed NHS treatment costs with each patient and it was evident that staff also checked and explained eligibility criteria before patients signed the treatment plan.

Notice Board and Leaflets checklist

1	Notice Boards <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are they clearly laid out and include key information?• At a height and location that patients can see key information?• Is there an important message you want patients to know about?
2	Is information available in different formats, such as large print or braille?

Practice Website

There were very few practices that did not have their own web sites as many provide private dentistry and additional services such as implants and cosmetic treatments. On some websites It wasn't always clear that NHS patients are accepted though some either provided specific page information or provided links through to the NHS website.

NHS charges and complaints policies were not routinely displayed.

Many practices provide clear directions of how to find them including an embedded Google Map .



Example of a banner for a NHS specific web page

Practice Website checklist

1	Ensure that NHS patients know what is available to them by providing NHS specific information
2	Display or provide links to NHS charges
3	The emergency and out of hours information and NHS 111 service is clearly displayed
4	Travel, parking and finding the practice is included in the 'Contact Us' section

NHS Website

The NHS website (formerly known as NHS Choices) is one of the key sources of information that NHS England says is available for the public to find a local dentist that is accepting NHS patients. Information here can be searched by town, city or post code.

The entry must be kept up to date to be useful. If this is not updated within a 90 day period no information is shown and patients cannot easily see if a dentist is offering NHS care for adults or children.

It is also important to ensure that the name on the NHS website corresponds with the name the practice uses at their physical location and on their own website rather than the owners name. We found a small number of practices whose entry did not match their name and this was an easy 'tweak' for them to put this right.

NHS Website checklist

1	All information is fully completed including opening times, facilities and accessibility
2	Practice has a process to update the NHS entry regularly
3	Information is consistent across all platforms (NHS, own website and at physical location)
4	The NHS entry name matches the name of the physical location and website



01727 855469

21 Russell Avenue, St Albans, Herts, Hertfordshire, AL3 5ES
<http://www.radental21.com>

Overview Departments and services Facilities Staff Contact Reviews and ratings Leave review

Overview

Opening times

Monday	09:00 - 18:00
Tuesday	09:00 - 18:00
Wednesday	09:00 - 18:00
Thursday	09:00 - 18:00
Friday	09:15 - 17:15
Saturday	Closed
Sunday	Closed

Additional information
practice is closed 1 - 2 for lunch every day
Last verified on 17/10/2017

Departments and services
To search for a specific treatment, use our [full list of departments](#)

Is this practice accepting new NHS patients?

- ✓ Children (up to the age of 18)
- ✓ Adults (18 and over)
- ✓ Adults entitled to free dental care

Last verified 28 days ago

[Understanding NHS dental charges](#)

Nearby Dentists
[Find nearby Dentists](#)

Example of a NHS entry on the NHS website

Staff Photos and Badges

Patients have told us that they like to see beforehand who they may be meeting and photos of staff in the practice and on their website can be helpful in this respect. People who have a learning disability or dementia find this particularly reassuring.

Some practices told us that staff were not always comfortable about having staff photos on display but would consider making them available for patients who requested it, such as those with a learning disability who like to know who they will be seeing.

Staff Photos and Badges Checklist

1	Staff photos visible at the practice and online
2	Alternate resource available for patients if the practice does not want staff photos publicly displayed
3	Staff have identification badges

Visible External Information

Good signage helps patients to locate the practice and most practices did use the NHS logo. Some practices also had information on whether they were currently accepting NHS patients.

Information visible to the outside of the practice should include the practice's emergency and out of hours process as well as the NHS 111 information.

The NHS website says:

For urgent dental treatment: call your dentist or use the [NHS 111 online service](#) if you cannot contact your dentist or you do not have one.

Visible External Information checklist

1	Clear signage shows the practice is available for NHS patients
2	NHS contracted opening hours are clearly displayed
3	The emergency and out of hours information is clearly displayed including the NHS 111 information

Complaints Handling

We found that dental practices had good processes for handling complaints and were always keen to resolve issues informally if at all possible. However information for patients about how to take their complaint further or where to obtain support was not consistent with national guidance and in some cases was out of date.

A **Statement on Dental Complaints** was produced by the Regulation of Dental Services Programme Board (NHS England, the NHS Business Services Authority, the Department of Health, the Care Quality Commission, the General Dental Council and Healthwatch England) in December 2016 to help ensure there is a shared understanding of the correct route for complaints among regulators, commissioners and providers.

We promoted the use of this statement throughout our work and we certainly noticed an increased use of the statement over time.

We noted that copies of the complaints policy were not always available online and recommended that this be added.

Some practices included a copy of the complaints practice in the patient's welcome pack.

Complaints Handling Checklist

1	The practice's complaints policy follows the standard set out in the Statement on Dental Complaints https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/dental-complaints-statement.pdf
2	'How to make a complaint' information is readily available for patients both at the practice and online on their website.

Patient Feedback

As part of our visits we checked whether 'Friends and Family' feedback forms were easily available, how patients are encouraged to fill them in and how this information was acted upon. A few practices also had their own patient questionnaires.

Some practices had patient feedback boxes in the reception and waiting rooms, while some others had 'Feedback' pages on their websites or had 'tablets' available. This is a great way to ensure that the patients' voices are being heard whether this is to say something positive or negative about the practice. Either way, it will only work towards the general improvement of the practice if staff are willing to listen. One practice had taken steps to show how they listened and acted upon patient feedback via a 'You said, We did' section on their noticeboard—this is excellent practice and makes it clear to patients that their voice matters.

A number of practices ensured their feedback forms were more prominently displayed following our visit.

We noted a number of good initiatives including one where the receptionist talks to patients after they have seen their dentist, ensuring that they understand what has happened, and are satisfied with the care they have received. This allows the practice to learn from small things that might not otherwise get reported, and also 'heads off' issues that might escalate into complaints. This 'after care' was felt to be good practice.

Patient Feedback Checklist

1	Friends and Family feedback Forms are easily available and well promoted
2	Other methods of engaging with patients to understand what matters to them have been used to gather feedback
3	Evidence of feedback and learning from complaints has resulted in improvements such as 'You Said, We Did' posters or discussed at team meetings

Communication and Support Needs

Practices we spoke to had systems in place to identify patients that had communication needs that were then recorded. However we did note an over reliance on using relatives (sometimes children) to communicate on behalf of those with a hearing impairment or those who did not speak or understand English.

A number of practices said they had staff who spoke different languages and they promoted that to patients. Others had used Language Line and Google Translate.

For patients who are deaf, some practices had used 'type talk' and commented that finding interpreters was often difficult though other practices had used British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

A number of practices did not already have a hearing loop installed, but most were happy to consider researching and purchasing a hearing loop to support patients following our visit.

'The hearing loop has been ordered and will be with us shortly'

Patients who lip read say sometimes clinicians forget to remove their masks when speaking to them and the Covid-19 pandemic will exacerbate this issue with more clinicians and patients having to wear masks. It will therefore be important for staff to think about how they can communicate effectively with patients who are deaf or have a hearing impairment.

Good practice was evidenced where patients who have support needs are given longer appointments.

Some practices have staff who had taken the 'Dementia Friends' induction to further understand those patient's needs.

'Three staff members are recognised 'Dementia Friends' able to help in these situations'

Most practices were aware of the Hertfordshire purple folder for people with learning disabilities and allowed extra time so that these could be completed with the patient and their carer who usually accompanies them. Those who were less aware of the purple folder agreed to raise awareness with staff.

Some practices told us they have a daily morning 'huddle,' and that additional patient needs are discussed during this meeting. The staff plan how to support an individual who may have difficulty accessing the building, or who has additional communication needs.

Safeguarding of vulnerable patients is taken seriously with practices displaying safeguarding posters and completing safeguarding training. A number of practices told us how they review cases so that everyone improves their learning.

'All staff have both vulnerable adult and child safeguarding training annually and as a part of their induction. Staff felt confident that they could recognize and raise safeguarding concerns with senior staff members.'

'We will also be discussing safeguarding on our monthly staff meetings'

Communications and Support Checklist

1	<p>Is there a hearing loop available that is regularly checked to see it is working?</p>  <p>The sign is blue with white text and a white icon of an ear and a hearing aid. The text reads: 'Induction Loop System', 'Please switch your hearing aid to "T"', and 'Small text: British Standard BS 6841:2002'.</p>
2	<p>The practice knows how to contact British Sign language interpreters for deaf people</p>
3	<p>The practice knows how to contact interpreters or other systems for people who do not speak or understand English</p>
4	<p>Staff are familiar with the Hertfordshire 'Purple Folder' for people with learning disabilities and this is included in new staff inductions. https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/adult-social-services/disability/learning-disabilities/my-health/my-health.aspx</p>  <p>The image shows a white baseball cap with a purple star logo and the word 'EQUALITY' below it. Next to it is a purple folder with the text 'CONFIDENTIAL', 'My Purple Folder', '(and my Health Action Plan 1447)', and the NHS logo at the bottom.</p>
5	<p>To support dementia patients, have a staff member who is a 'Dementia Friend' https://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/</p>
6	<p>Allow additional time for appointments</p>

Physical Access

Internal Access

Not all Reception desks were accessible for people using wheelchairs. This was sometimes due to the original design of the fixtures and fittings and would be considered as part of the next refurbishment. Where desks did not have a lowered section, staff told us that they had processes in place to ensure that all patients felt welcomed. For example reception staff would come out from around the desk to greet people who needed assistance, whether that was a wheelchair user, an elderly person or a parent with a pushchair.

Seating tended to be uniform rather than having a variety of seating (high and low, with or without arms) to support patients with different physical needs. Some practices had seating that allowed them to reconfigure the space more easily if a wheelchair user or parents with buggies were expected.

Toilets were available in the dental practices we visited but not all were accessible for either wheelchairs or people with dementia particularly where practices were in listed or old buildings. However we found practices very willing to enhance their facilities and consider improvements when they next looked at updating their premises.

Where practices had been adapted with an accessible toilet, which is certainly good practice, the facilities could be further enhanced. Practices may wish to take a fresh look at the positioning of some facilities such as wash basins and hand dryers, as well as colour contrasting of walls and floors and sanitary ware.

Most toilet facilities had an emergency red cord fitted and those that did not were keen to have one fitted as soon as possible.

‘We have already instructed an electrician to supply and fit a red emergency cord’

It is important to think about colour schemes that support people with dementia and those with sight impairments when planning future refurbishment within the practice.

Internal Access Checklist

1	Is the reception desk accessible to wheelchairs? If not what other arrangements are in place to welcome and support people using wheelchairs?
2	Is seating available in a choice of heights and styles?
3	Internal decoration takes account of colour schemes that will enhance the experience of those with sight impairments and those living with dementia
4	A red emergency cord is available in toilets
5	Paper and soap dispensers, as well as hand dryers are at a suitable height

External Access

External accessibility varied depending on location and age of the buildings. Some practices required permission from local councils to make improvements to external features. Similarly some practices had wanted to provide a disabled parking space but had had plans turned down by the local council.

Some practices were able to designate parking spaces on their drives or at the back of their buildings or ensured space was available when the patient visited.

Good access for wheelchairs, prams or buggies is essential but if this cannot be provided due to planning restrictions, then staff need to be aware of an alternative practice that is accessible so that patients can be signposted quickly and effectively for treatment.

External Access Checklist

1	The size of the entrance is suitable for wheelchair access
2	The bell is at a suitable height or there are alternate methods for alerting the staff
3	Step free access or ramp is available. The path to the surgery is accessible to people with limited mobility or sensory impairment
4	Hand rails are fitted on stairways or placed on both sides of slopes leading to an entrance door
5	Staff know where to signpost patients if patients cannot physically access their dental practice
6	Provide a disabled parking space or know where the nearest parking space is. Ensure there is enough space for a disabled person to exit a car safely.

What Next?

We have produced a full self-audit checklist within the appendix. The hope is that dental practices use the checklist as a starting point for discussion and for planning improvements to enhance the patient experience. Talking to their patients to find out what may make a difference to them will also help to ensure their individual needs are being considered.

If you are a dental patient, we encourage you to share this checklist with your practice, as well as share your experiences of dental services with us so that we can continue to work together to help improve services.

Appendix 1

Self-Audit Checklist

Notice Board and Leaflets checklist

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