

## **Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull's response to NHSEI West Midland's call for patients' experiences and concerns around access to NHS dental services**

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull welcome the opportunity to respond to NHSEI West Midlands call for patient's experiences and concerns around access to NHS dental services. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers (PPSuC) are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care.

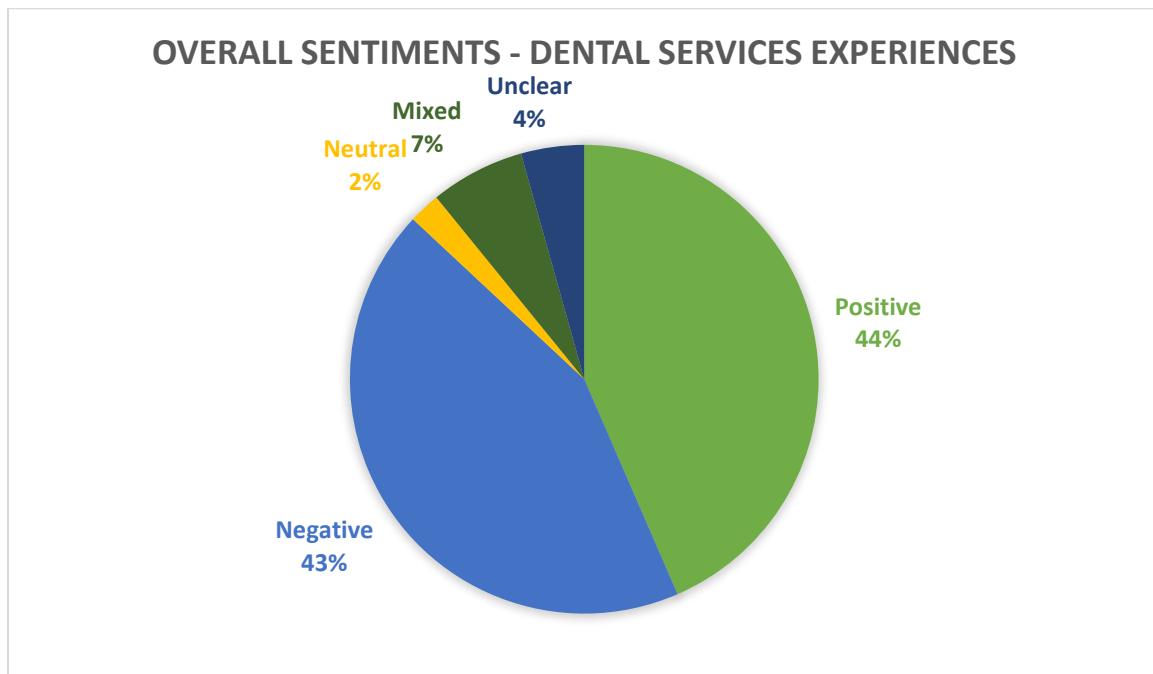
We welcome that NHSEI West Midlands is seeking to understand service user experiences of accessing dental care services. This is important for Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull as we have received both positive and negative experiences from people accessing dental care services. We believe that some of the experiences we have received will be useful to consider in any plans to improve or change dental services.

Historically, feedback collected between 2017 and 2018 in Birmingham demonstrated that people experienced poor quality of care, poor/lack of advice, lack of/inadequate information, lack of clarity regarding access to NHS dental care, fees and refunds, and rushed consultations. We also heard positive experiences from Birmingham residents about services they have accessed. They told us that best practice includes excellent communication, friendly and caring staff, good outcome, polite staff, clean and welcoming environment and good practice management.

During the lockdown (between 19<sup>th</sup> April and July, 2020), Healthwatch Birmingham run a survey to hear the experiences of Birmingham residents of health and social care. A majority of the respondents told us that there was a lack of information about accessing dental services with most service users seeing their service closed. Clearly, communication about services continues to be a concern for service users including the need to make information about services accessible (i.e. to those with sight loss, hearing loss, learning disability or a language barrier). Respondents to the survey also told us about the importance of having information and advice on how to self-care especially when most of the dental services closed down. Respondents also indicated that they wanted all dental services to have clear safety guidance that would reassure patients about safety standards when they accessed services.



Between April 2019 and October 2020, of the feedback that Healthwatch Birmingham received concerning dental services, 48 pieces of feedback included a dental practice name. Please find this feedback in Excel Spreadsheet 1 attached to our email. As the figure below shows, 44% of the feedback was positive, 43% was negative and 7% of the experiences were mixed, expressing both positive and negative feedback.



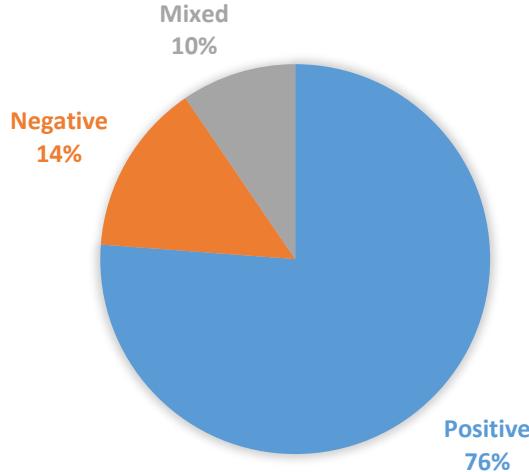
The main themes for the positive feedback were around good treatment and care; good communication between service users and staff; staff attitudes and the professionalism of staff; the cleanliness of the environment; clarity about treatment to be provided; good advice given and the importance of the dentists knowledge; and following good standards of care. On the other hand, the main themes for the negative feedback is about poor complaints procedures; poor quality of treatment and appointment; poor safety standards and failure to follow safety regulation; poor staff attitudes; issues around fees and cost of service; long waiting times; poor application of regulations such as those governing removal from practice list; poor communication between staff and patients; failure to advise patients about treatment; continuity of care; and variability between NHS and Private patients registered at the same practice in the service/care received. Excel spreadsheet 1 outlines the experiences we have heard between April 2019 and October 2020.

Similarly, Healthwatch Solihull received 21 cases of feedback regarding dental clinics in Solihull from March 2019 - October 2020 (For this feedback see Excel Spreadsheet 2). As the figure below shows, the feedback was mostly of a positive sentiment with 76% cases.



Fourteen percent of the cases were of a negative sentiment with 10% of the cases having a mixed sentiment.

#### OVERALL SENTIMENTS - DENTAL SERVICES EXPERIENCES



#### Treatment/Care

The most common theme observed in the feedback was Treatment/Care with 20 cases relating to this theme. Most were positive referring to staff as friendly and caring.

*“We were transferred to The Dentist after our local dentist retired. They are the best dentists I have ever been to. I never get nervous about going. We feel like family when we go. They treat you so well and are so friendly. I cannot fault any treatment we have had.”*  
- Respondent 134475

There were negative Treatment/Care feedback complaining about dental clinics trying to encourage patients to use private services instead of NHS services or not making the patient aware of the NHS services available.

*“Provides basic, 5 minute check-up, anything else requiring specialism e.g. root canal work one is directed to private treatment even when such things are available via NHS”* - Respondent 134492

#### Access to services

There was a case of negative sentiment regarding Access to Services. There were complaints of long waiting times for appointments.

*“When I have had treatment it has been good but getting an appointment is really difficult. I had an appointment in July they cancelled and next likely appointment will be March!!!!”*  
- Respondent 134484



In November 2018, Healthwatch Birmingham responded to NHS England's call for people's experiences of accessing 'in and out of hours' dental services. Below are some of the experiences we shared with NHS England:

**Quality and fees:**

*Dentist appeared to be in a hurry - definitely did not provide high quality care in accordance to the NHS constitution. Dentist was doing both the cleaning and the suction while the assistant was busy running in and out of the room. The welcome was cold, examination and cleaning of teeth was perfunctory, advice was non-existence, just like quality of service. Dentist are becoming like builders-you just can't trust them.*

*My main dentist was very good, doing everything to the best quality within my paid band. Last year I asked for a bridge replacement and paid £233.70. My existing white fillings were quite old and needed replacing as I wanted to go for whitening in the future. But my new bridge came off every single day. I think it is a new policy from her boss to save money on patients and do as poor a service as they can. On my next visit the owner changed my dentist. The new one put my bridge back but charged me twice for it! So I paid another £19.70 x 2 = £39.40. I said enough. I had already paid £233.70 for a rubbish bridge and one composite filling. The new dentist said they would do a new bridge and the fillings. So I paid half of band 3 at £119.54 (with no guarantee or anything). They replaced my bridge with a poor quality amalgam silver bridge. I said I do not want amalgam fillings! She ignored me and during my second visit changed my new white filling, done the month before, to a rubbish silver one. I was fuming I said I do not want it. She said I can't use white, your gums are bad (rubbish excuse!) I had told her 'no silver fillings!' "You do not read my records...because you just got rid of my new white filling done by your colleague. If she could manage with a white filling why can't you? She didn't answer so I asked. "So you wanted to put...rubbish silver fillings in without my consent?" She just said "yes". It's ridiculous treating patients like this. I've paid a fortune to look like a homeless person (with all due respect) while I'm 34 years old. What can I do now? I will never go back there, it is below any expectation of service.*

*Very disappointed - Went for a consultation for braces which cost £120 but turned out to just be a sales pitch that I paid for. Showing what I would look like once treatment was complete. Then advised would cost £4000 + another £249 consultation fee. Advised I would need to discuss finances then get back to them. They called me every week to see if I had made a decision and to tell me how good I would look once completed but I said I could*



only raise £4000 and was struggling to raise the extra consultation fees. I was told that people come from all over the world for his treatment and they don't negotiate on price. I said I wasn't negotiating but was hoping there was something they could do to help me. Once I said this the phone calls stopped and they did not even respond to my emails. I felt like they were not willing to work with me to come to an amicable resolution. I was very disappointed with their lack of help and now feel I will not ever go ahead with any treatment now and remain with crooked teeth forever. Very unsatisfactory.

*I had lower Molar Extraction. First of all the Treatment was very painful because it was not done professionally. Secondly Doctor left some part of it yet again and left me in extreme pain again. This is the second time they did this and it was the same Doctor as before as well. Last time after extraction I had an infection due to some part left inside and it was the worst pain of my life and I had to go to Dental Hospital. Before I did not make any complaints but this time I want to make a proper complaint.*

*I went to Nechells dentist. I got charged £350 for two teeth that needed filling. The dentist didn't do the filling properly. I also had to pay £20 to have my teeth checked.*

*I would like to complain about the poor treatment I have received from my dentist. Over a number of years I have seen the quality of my teeth degenerate to the point that it has affected my self-esteem and confidence. I have been told consistently by my dentist that there is nothing he can do as my condition is due to the ageing process. I recently visited another dentist and was asked 'how long it had been since I visited a dentist?', when I said only a few months ago, the new dentist was shocked as he assumed it had been several years judging by the condition of my teeth. I have written a letter of complaint.*

**Service users have also told us about problems with registering as NHS patients and lack of clarity for accessing NHS services.**

*I wanted to find a dentist on the NHS (paying NHS dental fees rather than exempt) and approached a dentist, who online showed as accepting both exempt and fee paying NHS patients as well as private patients. However when I went for treatment I was registered as a private patient which I didn't realise. I have since cancelled my treatment and found another dentist who has taken me on as an NHS patient. The dentists were very helpful in cancelling my treatment and refunding my deposit, but said that they had stated that they only took on NHS exempt patients. Caller wanted to know if this is correct and whether a dentist can be that selective.*



*I want to find out whether I can access an NHS dentist. I moved to Birmingham two months ago from Austria. I phoned two dentists who have said I need to pay privately. I was advised by an NHS dental practice that I cannot mix NHS and private treatment. I have been quoted £500 for one white filling and as a result am considering treatment from abroad.*

*I am having difficulty accessing a dentist able to conduct a home visit for my wife. She is housebound and needs impressions to be made for dentures.*

**Service users have also told us about waiting times for treatment:**

*I have chronic swelling in my mouth, which is partially reduced by antibiotics. I have difficulty eating. I was referred urgently to Birmingham Dental Hospital (BDH). Restorative consultant transferred care and treatment to the oral consultant. I now have to wait 10 to 12 weeks as the Dental Hospital said they are very busy. This will be in excess of the 18 weeks set and effectively this transfer is being treated as a new referral. I have been told that the issue is serious, but BDH administration have not marked my re-referral as urgent. I wish to raise the issue of poor interdepartmental transfer at BDH. It seems BDH classes inter-departmental transfers as new referrals. I have contacted PALs on a number advertised at the hospital but they are unable to speed the appointment up.*

*I received treatment at Birmingham Dental Hospital where a temporary (gel) cap was put on one of my teeth. The Hospital referred me to a specialist in root canal treatment (as I have no dentist). A referral was made on 22nd November 2017 but I have not received an appointment. I have made a complaint against the Dental Hospital but am concerned that they will not help him. The Dental hospital have pushed back my issues twice. I am in pain, my ears are blocked and I feel I have an infection.*

*I attended my dentist in May for a deep cleaning and following this, did not regain proper feeling in my tongue. The dentist examined me and suggested the nerve may be bruised and to come back in two weeks. The situation did not resolve, so the dentist referred me to Birmingham Dental Hospital. Several weeks went by, so I rang the dental hospital to chase, and was told that my referral may have been lost. I chased several times and eventually received an appointment following a last minute cancellation by another patient. I was then told by the dental hospital my nerve damage is likely to be permanent.*

*I believe that I am being given the run around. I needed a dental referral and have already had part of the treatment. I need specialist treatment and this should have been within 18 weeks. I called the hospital and the appointments unit say someone will contact me, but I have received no response.*



Other service users told us their concerns about difficulties getting a dentist appointment, how long they have to wait to see a dentist when they have booked an appointment and the length of appointment:

*I find it very difficult to get an appointment as it takes 2 months to get an appointment. So if you have a problem you will suffer. But I have to go to this dentist as this was the only one I managed to register with that accepted NHS Patients.*

*The Dentists don't turn up for appointments.*

*They take ages calling patients in and the nurse is nattering with receptionists and you waste two hours with a toothache and your appointment inside is 5 mins. Not good at all.*

*I visited the dentist 3 times. The wait was more than an hour. The Dentist came after 10am. You are going to spend your whole morning there. He does his treatment on you even if you feel pain. He made me get a night guard when I don't need one as I don't grind my teeth. He said it will keep my teeth in place. I asked if they are moving, he said no. The Surgery was very unclean.*

*The waiting times at Birmingham Dental Hospital are unacceptable.*

Some issues that Healthwatch Birmingham heard were specific to people with disabilities:

*I have had two dental incidents with my 2 daughters. My eldest daughter is meant to have a topography examination every year according to her doctor. However, she has gone several years without having an appointment. My other daughter is autistic and has some issues around getting appropriate dental treatment due to her being uncomfortable with some of the treatments and refusing to be seen.*

*I have a child living with autism. I went to the dentist and they don't really do anything. They asked that we come back after three months and gave no advice for helping/encouraging child to brush his teeth.*

*I am a mother of an autistic child and would like information on dental services. My dentist does not do anything when I visit and offers little advice on how to support my child's needs. I would like to make a complaint and I need help finding information on where I can get support.*

### Positive Feedback about dental services

Healthwatch Birmingham also shared positive feedback from service users about services they have accessed with NHS England. Below is some of that feedback:

*I have received good dental care. They help you out, they are kind and polite. They talk to you about day to day life too.*



Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull

Cobalt Square, 83 Hagley Road, Birmingham, B16 8QG

[www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk) | [info@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk) | 0800 652 5278

Company Registration No: 08440757

*The receptionist at my dental practice is a great communicator.*

*My dentist has a brilliant team and service. I visited for Implant treatment and found the entire experience with the doctor fantastic. The team are friendly and caring. I now have a new smile.*

*They are good caring people.*

*The Dentist was lovely - She was informative, professional and sanitary.*

*They offer regular checks and limited interventions. Very friendly environment, good with managing appointments and follow-up checks. Efficient all the time.*

*I have received excellent treatment from my dentist. I am made to feel at ease and the treatment I receive, far surpasses any I have ever received from any other dental surgeon in the past.*

*My dentist offers a very good service but sometimes they don't want to say what the issue is about.*

*My dentist has been great, no worries. There was a slight worry when I had to have part of my tooth taken off when I had tooth pain.*

*I felt that the whole journey was personalised. The reception team met me with a smile. After they completed my checks and updated my medical status, I was seen by my dentist who did a thorough assessment of my teeth. I had my teeth cleaned and polished. I was impressed with the X-ray technology they have and advice on healthy eating.*

*I needed urgent dental treatment and received it very promptly. The staff were friendly and efficient and caring. My immediate problem was dealt with but I am continuing to have treatment.*

*I went to drop off clinic and had dental check-up & treatment, they asked me to come back next week, had full x-rays, they did a filling. Great service for homeless people.*

*The dentist was excellent in how she treated me, my wife, and kids. She explained treatment very well, was gentle and caring. My wife is very scared of dental treatment. Staff were all welcoming and nice*

*My dentist at Fox & Goose Dental Centre, Ward End, is brilliant. He checked my cranial nerves the first time I went - I've never known another dentist do that. He doesn't do unnecessary work, and he explained really fully when I needed a crown. I wouldn't swap for another practice.*



## Conclusion

The positive feedback that the people of Birmingham and Solihull have shared with us demonstrates that service users value dental care that is personalised to their needs, the efficient management of appointments and follow-up checks, clear information about treatments and prompt access to services. In addition, service users also value the provision of additional dental services aimed at particular groups, for instance the drop off clinic in Birmingham for the homeless.

The negative feedback presented in this document shows that there is need for ensuring that service users have:

- Clarity and communication around dental fees and what this covers in terms of treatment. Including, charges when a course of treatment is over a certain period of time and does not conclude in one visit.
- Information and advice that is tailored to different groups such as those with a disability, those with difficulties understanding or speaking English etc. Dentists need to therefore understand the patient as an individual and ensure that treatment is tailored to their needs. Dentists need to address access and health inequality issues.
- Clarity on treatments that are included within each NHS dental band charge and those that are private.
- Clarity on referral pathways, waiting times and corresponding charges.
- Clear information on diagnosis and treatment (therefore clear information on procedures being carried out and when they are carried out).
- Appropriate use of guidelines such as that for removing patients from practice lists and safety
- Clarity around complaints procedures

This feedback also highlights important considerations NHSEI West Midlands needs to take in order to ensure that people have access to services. Service users need to be assured that these services are of good quality, safe and offer timely treatments.

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull believe that in order for NHSEI West Midlands to commission services that are accessible to different groups, safe, offer timely treatment and are personalised there has to be a strategy for communicating with service



users. The NHS will have to develop ways of collecting continual feedback to ensure that services provided by dentists meet their needs and are person-centred.

Yours Sincerely,



Chipiliro Kalebe-Nyamongo  
Research and Policy Manager  
Healthwatch Birmingham



Kemi Adebanjo  
Project Officer  
Healthwatch Solihull



