

Access to Dentists During COVID-19 Pandemic

July 2021



Accessible formats

This report is also available in Welsh.

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About the Community Health Councils (CHCs)

CHCs are the independent watchdog of the National Health Service (NHS) within Wales. CHCs encourage and support people to have a voice in the design and delivery of NHS services.

CHCs work with the NHS, inspection and regulatory bodies. CHCs provide an important link between those who plan and deliver NHS services, those who inspect and regulate it and those who use it.

CHCs hear from the public in many different ways. Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs regularly visited NHS services to hear from people while they were receiving care and treatment. CHCs also heard from people at local community events, and through community representatives and groups.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs have focused on engaging with people in different ways.

This includes surveys, apps, videoconferencing and social media to hear from people directly about their views and experiences of NHS services as well as through community groups.

There are 7 CHCs in Wales. Each one represents the “patient and public” voice in a different part of Wales.

Powys CHC represents the views of people living in Powys whether the NHS services they use are within or outside of Powys.

Background & Introduction

NHS dental contracts between dentists and health boards changed in April 2006 and this resulted in changes to the dental system in Wales. Patients are no longer required to be registered with a particular dentist. Patients can continue to keep seeing their usual dentist, who can choose to maintain a list of NHS patients to whom they provide regular or ongoing treatment or care¹.

With this change in contract, responsibility for arranging out-of-hours dental services became the responsibility of health boards. For Powys, the service is accessed by phoning NHS 111. This number is also the helpline number for people to call if they do not have an NHS dentist and they require urgent treatment.

Powys Teaching Health Board also provides a community dental service from five clinics across Powys – in Welshpool, Newtown, Llandrindod Wells, Brecon and Ystradgynlais. This service is for people who may not otherwise seek or receive dental care, such as people with learning disabilities, elderly housebound people, people with mental or physical health problems or other conditions which prevent them from visiting a dentist. The community dental service is normally accessed by referral from general dental professionals and other health professionals. However, patients, including children, who are unable to access a local dentist may contact the clinic directly.

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, routine primary care dental services were paused in March 2020. This was to keep patients and staff safe and to help stop the spread of the virus.

¹ <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/localservices/dentistfaq/>

Urgent primary care dental services continued to be provided by dentists including face-to-face treatment if required. Urgent treatment that required an aerosol generating procedure, such as drilling a tooth, required the patient to be referred to a dedicated urgent dental centre.

In June 2020, dental practices in Wales entered the “recovery phase” and began to provide more services. Dentists were asked to prioritise the needs of their patients and to see patients with known problems or who had outstanding treatment needs and to offer more routine treatments if capacity allowed. Because of the need to ensure safety, strict infection control measures had to be put in place. This new way of working meant that the number of patients seen in a day was much lower than before the pandemic.

At the time of writing this report (March 2021), there are still restrictions on the types of service that can be provided and the number of patients who can be seen. Most dental practices have now been able to put in additional infection control safeguards so that they can offer more complex procedures, including aerosol generating procedures. However, there are some practices in Powys that are still not able to provide aerosol generating procedures.

What We Did

During the coronavirus pandemic, people across Wales have been able to share their views and experiences of NHS care with us by completing the All Wales CHCs online [national survey](#) "NHS Care During Coronavirus Emergency".

On an ongoing basis, CHCs share what they are hearing from people in their communities with their local health boards. At a national level, the Board and CHCs across Wales meets with the Welsh Government every week to discuss what we are hearing across Wales and the actions needed.

During November 2020, we shared the national survey on our social media pages, and asked a question about access to dental services in Powys. We asked people to share their experiences by completing the national survey.

106 people from Powys responded and completed the survey.

This report highlights the key things we heard from people in the survey.

In November, we also received a copy of a letter from Llandrindod Wells Town Council to Powys Teaching Health Board which raised concerns about the availability of dental care in the area. The letter and response from Powys Teaching Health Board is attached at Appendix A.

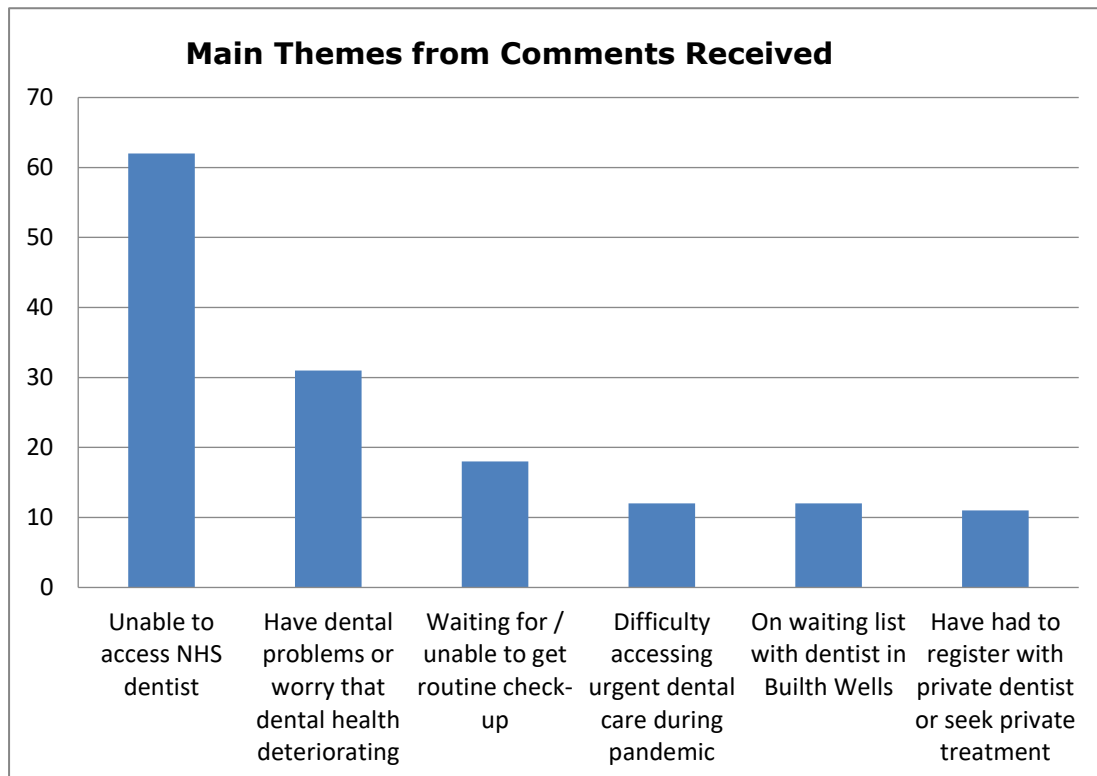
After hearing from people about the difficulty in obtaining NHS Dental Treatment, the CHC undertook some further work to understand more about dental services available across Powys. A 'mystery shopper' exercise took place in order to determine the availability of NHS Dental Services across Powys. We also

issued a survey to dental practices in Powys, asking them for information about services being offered.

This report also details the findings of this work.

What We Heard From The Survey

The main themes from comments received are shown in the graph below:



58% of people who completed the survey (62 out of 106) told us that **they were unable to access an NHS dentist in Powys.**

Some people told us about problems they had with their teeth and some expressed concerns that their dental health was deteriorating because they were unable to see a dentist.

We also heard from people who said they had been on a waiting list with a dentist in Builth Wells and they did not know how long

they were going to have to wait. People had not received any information after being placed on the list.

Been trying to register with a NHS dental practice for 3 years, given up now

My usual dentist says that they are no longer taking on patients and I am unable to see them because I missed seeing them for two years! There is nowhere else.

Me and my children have not been able to access dental care for approximately 2 years. Appointments at our Llandrindod practice were postponed twice due to resignation of dentist and no cover. No other appointments have been offered. The only other alternative was for us to drive 1.5 hours (3 hour round trip) to Ystradgynlais. The situation in Powys is dire and needs to be resolved.

Lived in Powys for just over 2 years and have not been able to get a NHS dentist. Pensioner so can't afford private prices and I am in desperate need of treatment.

Since leaving the military in 2007, I have been unable to access NHS dental services. Efforts to use emergency drop in centres seem to require that I am in acute pain. In reality I know my teeth are being neglected and several do cause me pain. I would simply like there to be accessible care for me.

We have no service. Phoned for an appointment in August as I had a cracked tooth. Told to phone back in 2021.

I am in agony with my teeth. I cannot get an appointment with the local dentist in Llanidloes no matter how I try. I don't have a car and can't get anywhere else. I had to take 4 paracetamol to relieve the pain last night.

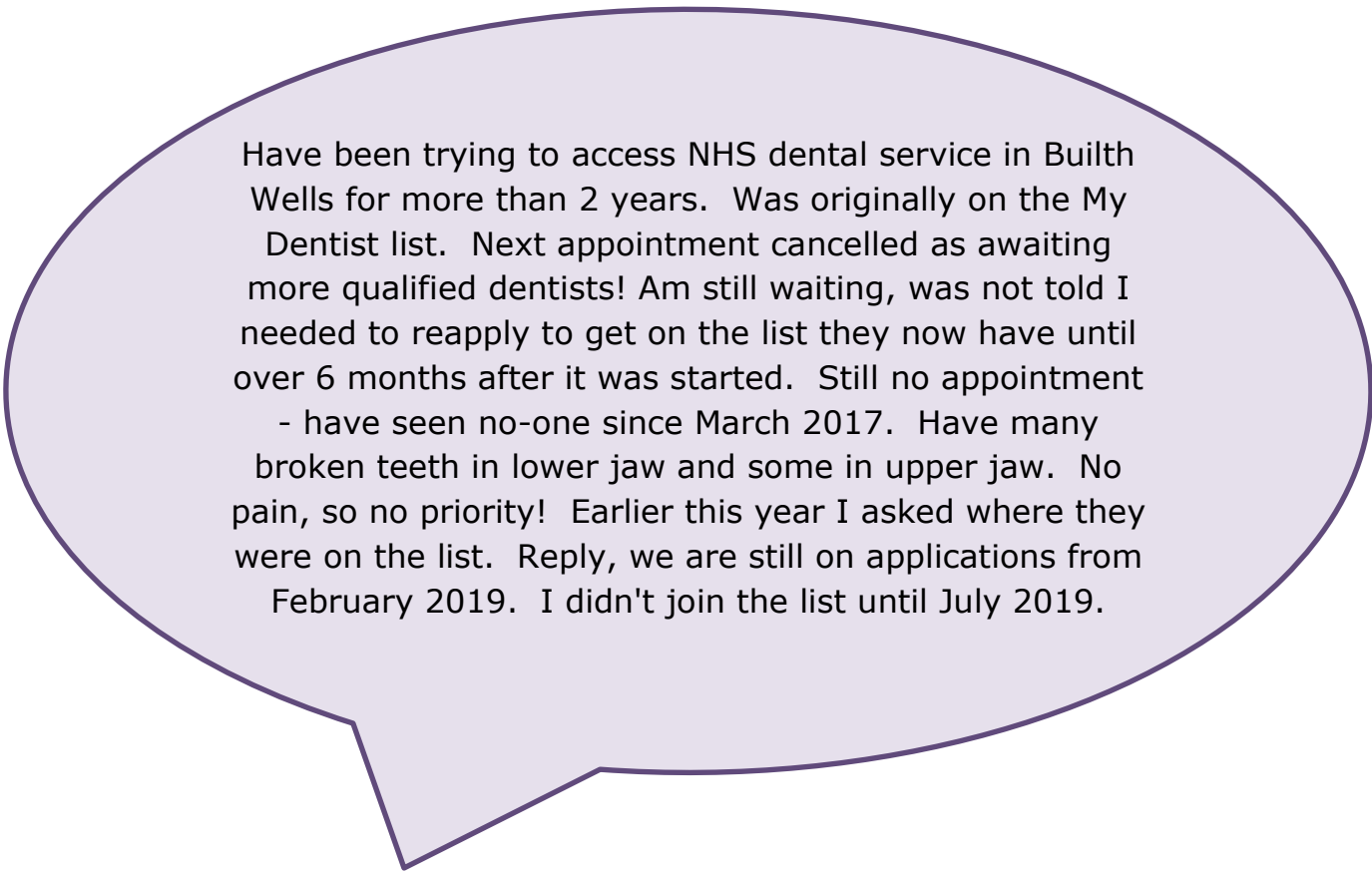
Broke a tooth. Not in pain. Trying to get help before it became a throbbing mess. Went around in circles with NHS direct. Web site said phone. Phone said Website. Called dental surgeries directly to be told they would not see me. Ended up in tears trying to source help. And have still completely failed. Because the dentist I was with has ceased trading

Some people who were registered with a dentist reported that they were concerned about waiting a long time to get a routine check-up. They did not know when they would be able to have an appointment.

Some people also reported difficulties they had in accessing urgent dental care during the pandemic.

Some people who did get urgent, temporary treatment during the pandemic were concerned that they needed follow-up treatment but they were unable to get an appointment.

Other people reported that they had appointments booked for treatment to be carried out just before the national lockdown commenced in March 2020. These appointments were cancelled but people did not know when they would get the treatment they were booked to have.

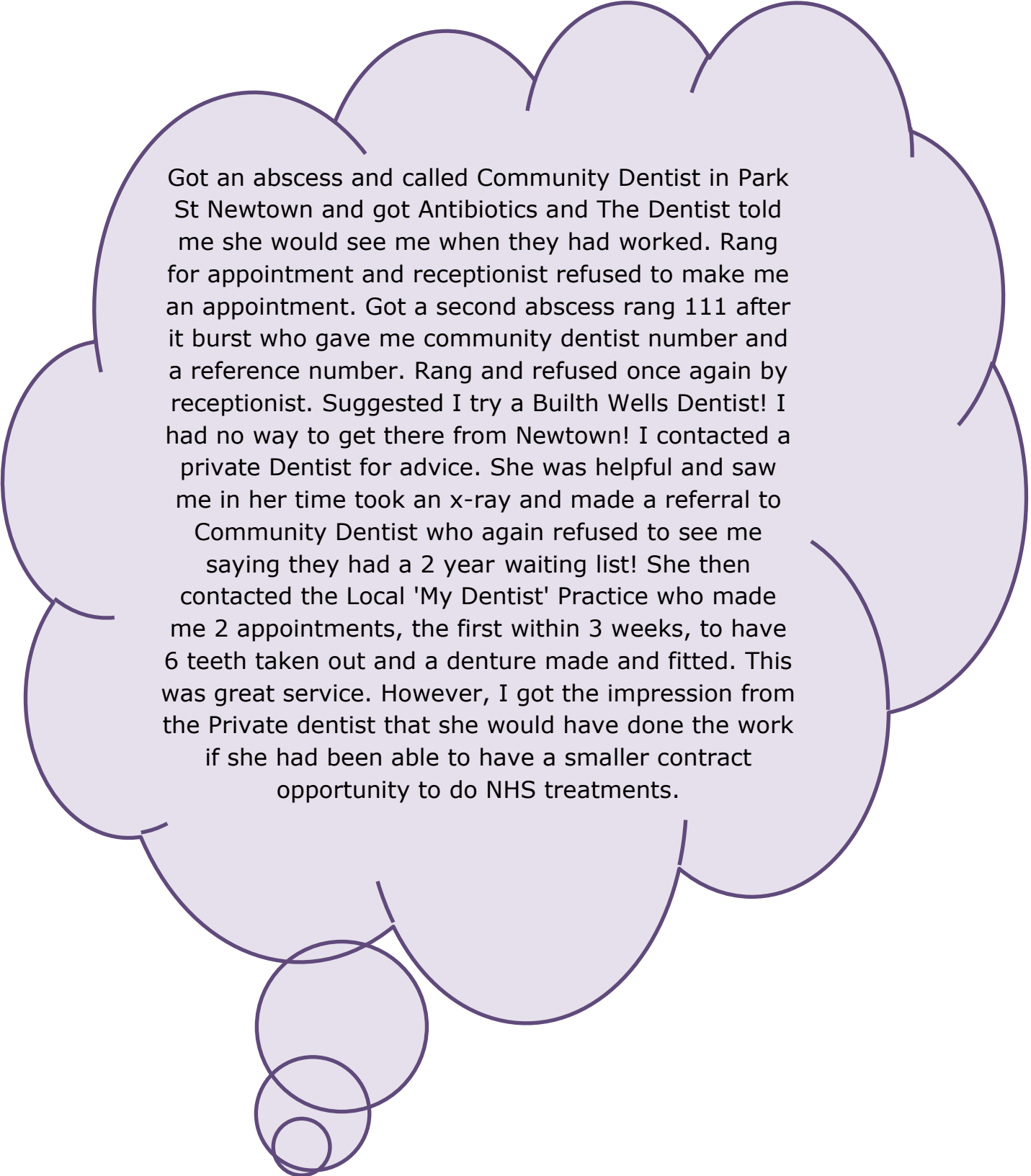


Have been trying to access NHS dental service in Builth Wells for more than 2 years. Was originally on the My Dentist list. Next appointment cancelled as awaiting more qualified dentists! Am still waiting, was not told I needed to reapply to get on the list they now have until over 6 months after it was started. Still no appointment - have seen no-one since March 2017. Have many broken teeth in lower jaw and some in upper jaw. No pain, so no priority! Earlier this year I asked where they were on the list. Reply, we are still on applications from February 2019. I didn't join the list until July 2019.

My family of 2 adults and 2 children have been unable to access dental care in Builth Wells for several years now. We put our names back on the list when the practice restarted a couple of years ago but have still never been called for a check up

I had a filling fall out leaving me with a painful tooth. I ran the local dentist in Knighton who refused to see me and told me to ring 111. After 6 phone calls from different people in a single day, I was allocated to the same dentist in Knighton for an appointment the next day. She was extremely rude and unhelpful and all she did was to put some temporary filler in my tooth. She refused to provide any followup appointment to replace the temporary filling. So I now have a tooth with a temporary filling that could fall out at any time.

MyDentist Brecon cancelled numerous appointments over the last 18 months. During lockdown I suffered with toothache from a loose molar, I waited 3 weeks for an emergency appointment, which they proceeded to cancel the day before I was due to visit. They made a second appointment for 2 weeks later, I finally managed to find a different private dentist to extract my tooth. Meanwhile I had also telephoned the dental dept. of Brecon hospital, the person I spoke to was unhelpful and was going to get someone to call me back - I am still waiting for that call! Dental services in this area are woefully inadequate.



Got an abscess and called Community Dentist in Park St Newtown and got Antibiotics and The Dentist told me she would see me when they had worked. Rang for appointment and receptionist refused to make me an appointment. Got a second abscess rang 111 after it burst who gave me community dentist number and a reference number. Rang and refused once again by receptionist. Suggested I try a Builth Wells Dentist! I had no way to get there from Newtown! I contacted a private Dentist for advice. She was helpful and saw me in her time took an x-ray and made a referral to Community Dentist who again refused to see me saying they had a 2 year waiting list! She then contacted the Local 'My Dentist' Practice who made me 2 appointments, the first within 3 weeks, to have 6 teeth taken out and a denture made and fitted. This was great service. However, I got the impression from the Private dentist that she would have done the work if she had been able to have a smaller contract opportunity to do NHS treatments.

I registered my [child] a few days after [they] were born. [...] is now going to be 3 in April and has yet to see a dentist. My [other child] will not have been seen for 3 years in April. During the pandemic, my filling has fallen out but as I'm not in any pain it isn't an emergency. No doubt, my tooth will have gotten worse over the last 6 months. I was due a check-up in September, this was cancelled, and I have yet to be rebooked in.

This is appalling and recently it is the norm in Powys, not because of the pandemic but because of the lack of dentists in the area

Had toothache all through first lockdown as treatment was postponed when eventually I was seen the filling I needed was done but I was in and out so quick I was certain a proper job hadn't been done and sure enough the filling has come out again!

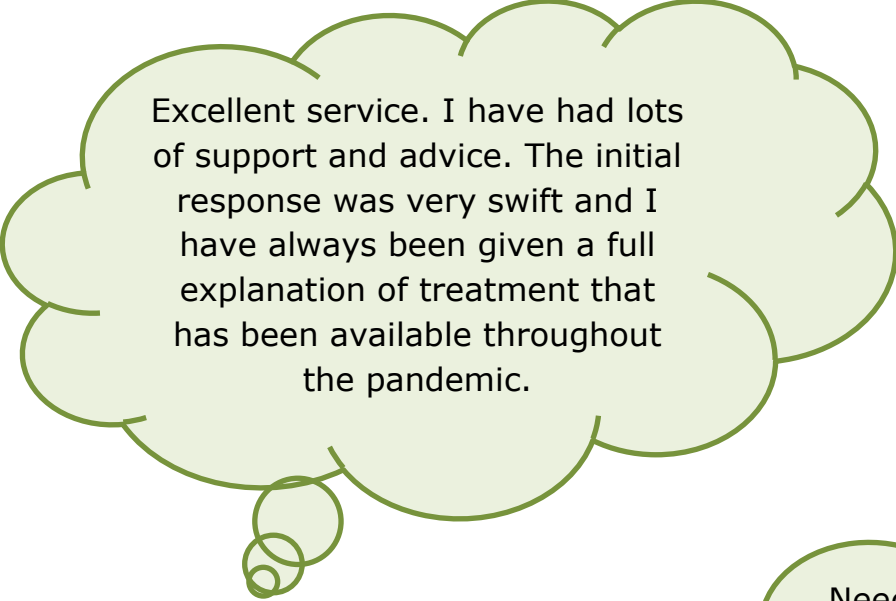
My husband & myself moved to Powys days before lock down. We have been suffering since then as no dentist will take on NHS patients. I have lost one filling, a crown has fallen out & another filling is failing. I am lucky as so far I am not in pain, my husband is not so lucky, he has loose lower teeth that are bleeding and are very painful.

My [child] was due to have some teeth removed before being fitted for a brace. This removal procedure has been cancelled with no reschedule date at all. I am concerned about the timing of the brace work being delayed indefinitely. At the very least keep in contact with patients to let them know they have not been completely forgotten.


Waited over a year for a dentist appointment despite having broken tooth. still can't have problem sorted because I require gas and air due to being dental phobic and that isn't allowed at the moment apparently unless I go to England.

I chipped my front tooth and attended an appointment 05/02/20.
I was told that I required a filling. I paid £46 for this examination, immediately.
I received an appointment for 23/03/2020.
I then received a phone call to tell me that the appointment was cancelled due to coronavirus and lock down.
10/11/2020 there has been no further communication. My tooth remains chipped, with a risk of further damage.

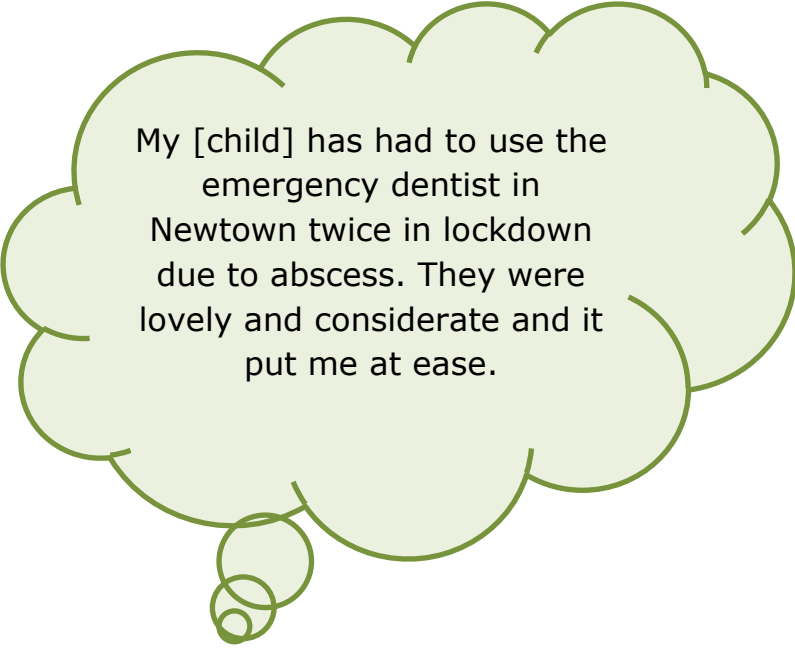
Some people provided positive comments about dental services.



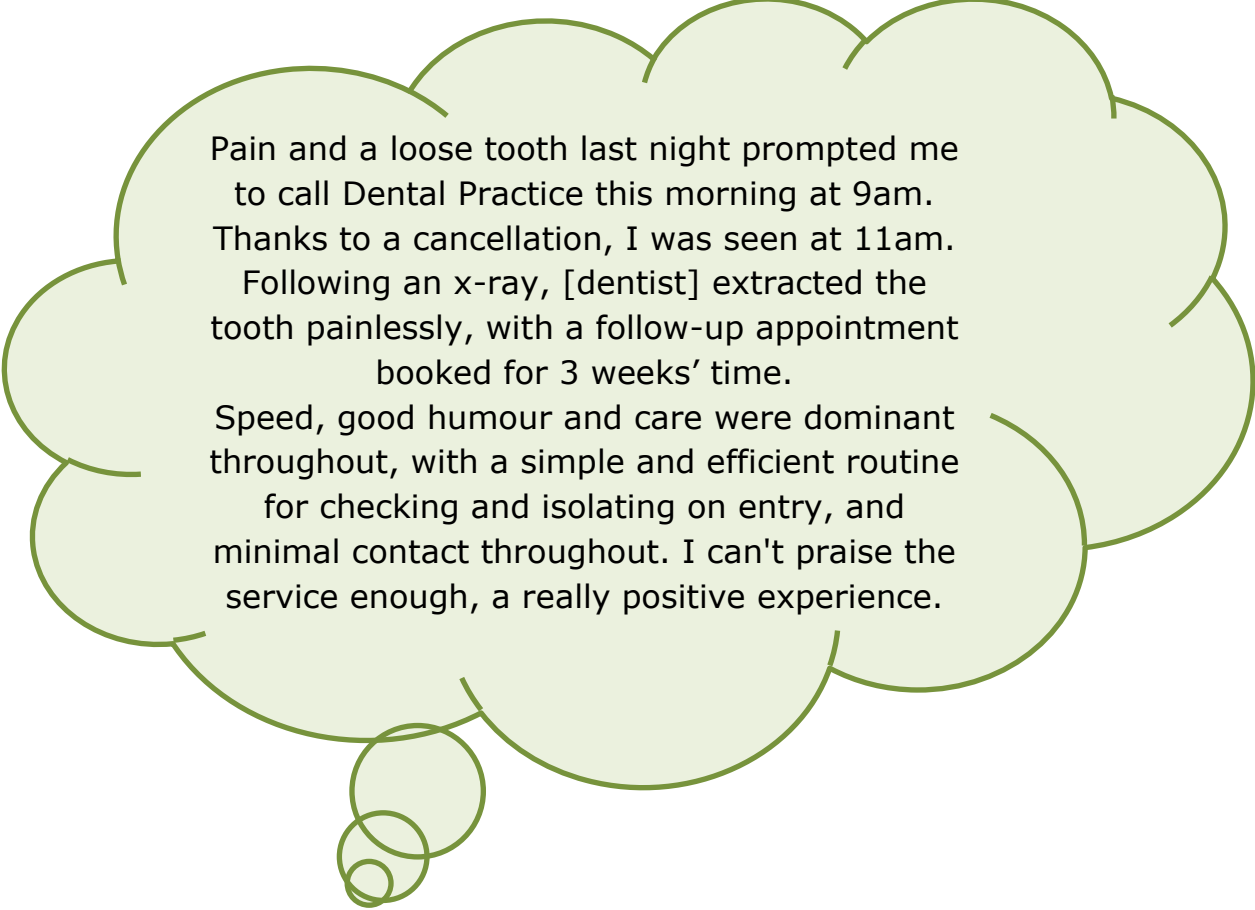
Excellent service. I have had lots of support and advice. The initial response was very swift and I have always been given a full explanation of treatment that has been available throughout the pandemic.



Needed fillings and able to get appointment within 2 weeks. Excellent service. Felt safe when attending.



My [child] has had to use the emergency dentist in Newtown twice in lockdown due to abscess. They were lovely and considerate and it put me at ease.



Pain and a loose tooth last night prompted me to call Dental Practice this morning at 9am. Thanks to a cancellation, I was seen at 11am. Following an x-ray, [dentist] extracted the tooth painlessly, with a follow-up appointment booked for 3 weeks' time.

Speed, good humour and care were dominant throughout, with a simple and efficient routine for checking and isolating on entry, and minimal contact throughout. I can't praise the service enough, a really positive experience.

The 'Mystery Shopper' Exercise

Aim

The aim of this piece of work was to determine the availability of access to NHS Dental Services in Powys, if the patient requesting treatment was not currently registered with an NHS Dentist, and they were experiencing dental pain.

What We Did

We obtained the contact details for each NHS Dental Practice in Powys from the NHS 111 Wales website which totalled 23 practices.

The CHC then tried to contact each of those practices by telephone to determine the availability of access to NHS Dental Services. The exercise was carried out on one day, Wednesday 20th January 2021.

In the scenario used, our volunteer members were calling on behalf of a friend or family member who was suffering dental pain. The patient in question was not currently registered with an NHS Dentist and was attempting to access NHS Dental services.

Our members asked the following four questions:

- Is the practice accepting registration of new NHS Dental patients?
- If the practice is accepting new NHS patients, how long would a new patient have to wait for an appointment?

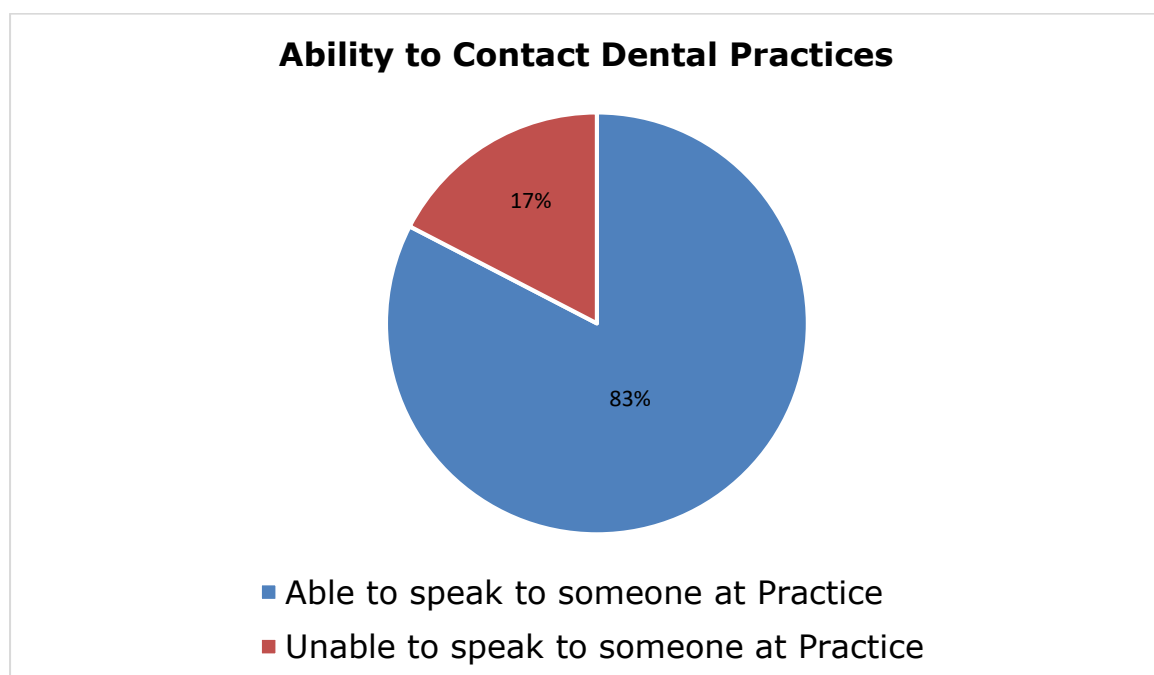
- If the practice is not accepting new NHS patients, would the patient be able to be seen privately?
- If the practice was able to see the patient privately, how long would a new private patient have to wait for an appointment.

It should be noted that the monitoring of private health care services is not within the remit of the CHC. The rationale for asking whether a patient could be seen privately was based upon feedback from the public that they believed they could obtain dental care if they opted for and paid for private treatment.

What We Were Told

CHC members attempted to contact 23 dentists in Powys during the one day exercise.

The results of this exercise are shown below:



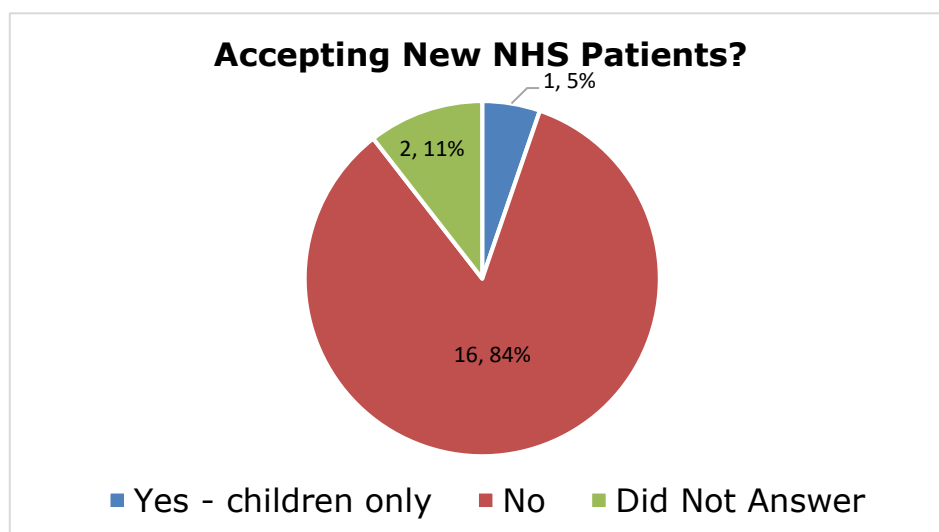
The pie chart above shows that our members were able to get through and speak to a member of practice staff at 19 (83%) of the dental practices.

For 3 of the remaining 4 dental practices, our members obtained answerphone messages:

- 1 practice had a message requesting callers to leave a number and the practice would call back. However, it would not have been appropriate for our members to leave a message for a call back for this exercise.
- 1 practice had a message advising that the practice was closed until the next day.
- 1 practice had a message advising that the practice was closed and patients were referred to Newtown.

When contacting the other practice, the call went to a high-pitched sound similar to a fax machine. The CHC member attempted to call again the next day to test whether it was a fault on the telephone, but got the same high-pitched sound.

Question 1 – Is the practice accepting registration of new NHS dental patients?

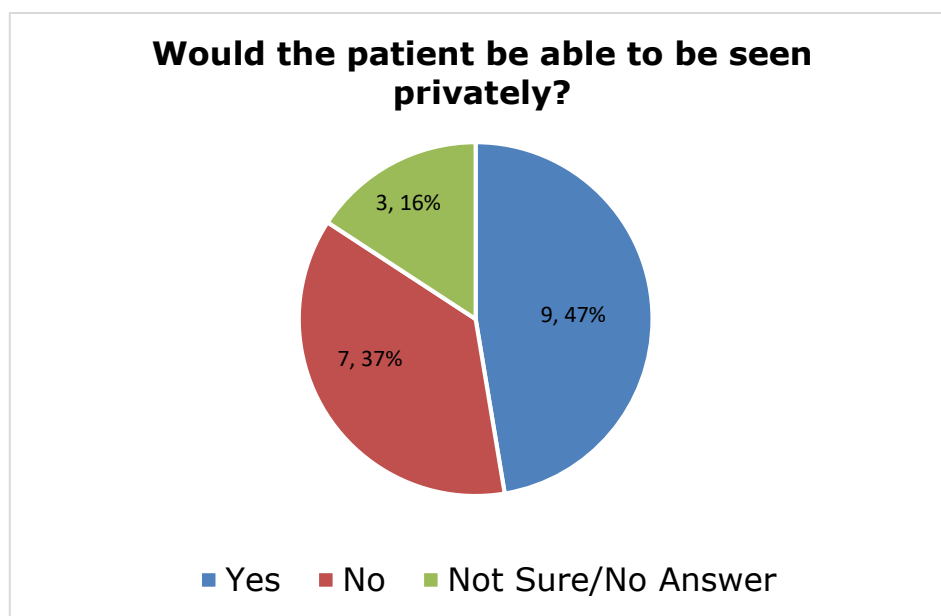


The above pie chart shows that 16 out of the 19 practices we were able to speak to advised that they were not accepting any new NHS patients, 1 practice was able to accept new NHS patients but this was for children only, and 2 practices did not answer the question directly.

Question 2 – If the practice is accepting new NHS patients, how long would a new patient have to wait for an appointment?

As none of the practices contacted were able to accept new NHS registrations for adults, there were no answers recorded for this question.

Question 3 – If the practice is not accepting new NHS patients would the patient be able to be seen privately?



2 practices advised that they do not offer private dental care.

2 practices advised that they are not able to take on any new patients at all, with one giving the impact of COVID as the reason for this.

1 practice advised that they were not accepting new private patients due to the length of wait to be seen.

Question 4 – If the practice was able to see the patient privately, how long would a new patient have to wait for an appointment?

We received the following answers to this question:

Long wait as snowed under with NHS patients waiting and a small number of dentists who are not in a lot.
Have a scheme called "My Options" but not accepting new patients on to it until probably April.
From March/April.
Same day.
Same week – appointment available for the Friday (2 days).
5 days.
6 days.
Next available appointment Wednesday 3 rd February (2 weeks).
March.

8 of the practices we spoke to suggested that the caller or patient could contact 111 for information about urgent dental services available.

Survey Issued to Dental Practices

In order to gain as complete a picture as possible of dental services in Powys, we issued a short survey to each practice in Powys to gather information on services.

We wanted to obtain information about access to appointments, the types of appointment/treatments being offered to patients, how information was being provided to patients and also about physical access to dental practices. A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix B.

We issued the survey to 23 practices and received 9 completed surveys. The information we received is summarised as follows:

- 5 of the practices had staff vacancies. Vacancies included 1 dentist, 1 associate dentist, 3 dental nurses, 2 therapists and 2 hygienists.
- 5 of the practices had a dedicated practice website.
- 5 of the practices had a Facebook site.
- All 9 practices carry a list of registered NHS patients.
- Practices used a variety of methods to provide updates to patients. 7 practices had an introductory message on their telephone system, 7 practices had information on notices outside the practice entrance, 5 practices used their website, 4 practices used email, 3 practices used text messages, 3 practices posted information out to patients, 5 practices used social media, 3 practices signposted people to NHS 111 Wales.
- 3 practices said they did not provide information in different formats. 3 practices provide material in large print, 2

practices provide bilingual leaflets (English and Welsh).

- 6 practices stated that they were unable to accept any new NHS patients, 2 practices could accept children only and 1 practice was able to accept adults and children.

The reasons provided for being unable to accept new NHS patients were:

With Covid restrictions, we are limited on surgery space and appointment time. To get through the backlog of our own patients is going to take a long time therefore we are not accepting new patients.
Currently unable to accept new patients due to backlog of our own patients to see. Fallow time and additional PPE have caused less surgery time so we are limited on how many patients we can treat.
Due to dentist leaving and lack of capacity
Contract is at capacity
Only one dentist at practice

- The following types of treatment/appointments were available:

All 9 practices were carrying out routine assessments and checks

7 practices offered Same day urgent/emergency treatment

6 practices offered Treatment for patients experiencing pain

7 practices carried out telephone consultations

5 practices were able to offer video consultations

9 practices carried out Aerosol generating procedures

9 practices carried out Intraoral X-rays (when the X-ray film is inside the mouth and the most common type of dental X-ray)

3 practices carried out Extraoral X-rays (when the X-ray film is outside the mouth)

- 5 practices were able to treat NHS patients who were not registered with the practice, but this would be on referral from the Health Board dental helpline or NHS 111.
- 2 practices said they could treat NHS patients who were not registered with the practice, if they were experiencing pain or had an urgent dental problem.
- 2 practices would not be able to treat NHS patients who were not registered with the practice.
- We asked practices to tell us how appointments were made or notified to patients:

6 practices sent appointments out by post

6 practices were able to send appointments by text

5 practices were able to send appointments by email

6 practices offered patients the opportunity to telephone to book an appointment

1 practice told us they were prioritising routine appointments and they had recently had a new computer system which allowed them to send text messages and emails.

All 9 practices were able to send appointment reminders by text.

- 7 practices were using a triage system either at the point of call or call back the same day.
 - 1 practice was using triage for NHS 111 referrals only.
 - 1 practice was not using triage.
- We asked practices how they were providing information to patients about COVID safety precautions for attendance at the practice. They told us:

We contact each patient 24 hours before their appointment to carry out a COVID questionnaire and explain the process of coming in to see us. - One patient in the practice at any time, - Staff and patient to wear PPE (mask), - Cleaning procedures, - Payment by card (where possible).

We contact patients the day before to run through a COVID questionnaire. We also explain the process of our one way system. We use PPE in all areas of the practice and enhanced PPE for certain procedures. We prefer contactless payments. We have hand gel available and screens for patients and staff.

Email has procedures. Windows outside practice and website too.

Arranging appointments, we explain our Covid19 prescribed treatments over the phone directly to the patient. Also, on arrival at the surgery there is an easy-to-understand information list on the notice board outside the door, so that all patients are aware of the situation before entering. On arrival, a member of the Team meets with the patient and guides them in to explain the process.

COVID policy, waiting room structure, arrival time, PPE requirements, temperature check.

Arrival on time, limited numbers in reception, temperature check on arrival, wear a face mask, different doors for entrance and exit, or given verbal, or confirmed via email if needed.

Covid regulations, mask, attend alone if possible, temperatures taken and covid questionnaire. Hand sanitiser stations available.

Assure them we are fully covid 19 compliant social distancing, PPE, hand gel use, reduced foot fall in the practice.

New protocols are explained to patient over the phone, we operate a closed door policy, patients & staff are covid screened everyday & temperatures taken, social distancing is adhered to, a one system is in place & we have mechanical ventilation units in all surgeries. Further appointments and payments are taken over the phone.

- Because we had received comments from some people about difficulty with physical access to dental practices, we asked the practices to tell us about the physical access to their buildings. We received the following information:

We are a first floor surgery but have a lift for easy access. We have a low front desk to allow eye contact with wheelchair patients. All walk ways are clutter free. We have a loop system available.

We have 2 entrances, one is level access for physical disability.

There are two steps on entry, but we have a dedicated ramp for ease of use, with a guide when entering the surgery. There are guidelines when coming upstairs, or I have a room on the first floor if it is not possible to go upstairs. Signs are bilingual in large print.

There is a step in to the practice, but we have a mobile ramp which can be deployed at a moments notice. There is insufficient space to have ramp on the pavement. Reception and one surgery are on the ground floor.

Main entrance door is a wide, with a ramp, private car park on level access.

Ramp access to practice, section of reception desk lower to provide access.

Assisted door at the front, wide doorways, ramp to back door, disabled parking, disabled dental chair, all ground floor dental surgeries.

We have onsite parking and all of our facilities, including our treatment rooms, are fully accessible to those with mobility difficulties & wheelchair access. We have a portable hearing loop and translation services are available on request.

Learning From What We Heard

From the information we received from the patient survey, it is clear that there are many people living in Powys who are not able to access good quality NHS dental services.

Residents in Powys are not able to register as new NHS patients with a dentist. This was confirmed by the additional work carried out by the CHC through the 'mystery shopper' exercise and by the survey responses from dental practices when practices informed us that they were not able to accept new registrations of NHS patients.

Because of the necessary safety precautions in place for COVID-19, the number of dental appointments available is reduced. Many patients who are registered with a dentist reported that they are not receiving the routine checks they normally would.

The lack of dental services is having a negative impact on people. People are worried that their own dental health or the dental health of their loved ones is deteriorating because they are not able to get the treatment they require.

The importance of preventive dentistry appears to have lessened dramatically during the period of the Coronavirus pandemic.

People who had appointments or procedures cancelled because of the pandemic reported that they had received no communication about when they are likely to be seen.

Recommendations

1. The CHC recommends that Powys Teaching Health Board undertakes an urgent review of dental provision in Powys. The CHC recommends that an improvement plan is developed and implemented as a matter of urgency.
2. People need clear information on how they can access advice or dental treatment when they experience problems with their teeth. This is particularly important for people who have been unable to register with an NHS dentist.

There is very little information on the Health Board website about dental services. It is acknowledged that information was available on the Health Board's previous website but the information has not migrated to the new website. Up to date information about the availability of dental services within Powys and how to access those services needs to be available to the public.

3. It is important to keep people informed about what is happening with dental services as we move through the pandemic, so that people know and understand what services they can expect to receive.

The CHC would urge Welsh Government to provide information about whether a backlog of dental care and treatment now exists because of the pandemic. If there is a backlog, an explanation of the plan to address it is required.

4. The CHC believes that NHS dental provision across Wales is inadequate. People had difficulty accessing dental care before the COVID pandemic hit and the situation has worsened because of the pandemic. We would request Welsh Government to provide a plan which outlines how access to NHS dental services can be improved. This should include information about recruitment and training of dental practitioners.

Response from Powys Teaching Health Board

We submitted this report to Powys Teaching Health Board for a response prior to publication. We also received a presentation from the Health Board's primary care team at a Full Council meeting on 8 June 2021. The presentation included an update on dental services in Powys.

The response from the Health Board included the following information:

Concerns in communities relating to dental access pre-date the Covid pandemic but it can be argued that dental teams have been impacted more than any of the other primary care contracted services as a result of Covid-19. The specific issue of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs), which is a large percentage of the work undertaken by a dentist, has impacted on the clinic capacity and throughput.

The enhanced infection, prevention and control (IPC) requirements have meant that dental teams are practicing dentistry in a difficult environment.

Despite the greater occupational health challenges to the team working in the current pandemic, dental practices have remained open and in Powys activity has increased month on month during this recovery phase. We are now seeing urgent level of care similar to that delivered prior to the pandemic which indicates that more routine care is now being provided.

General dental services (GDS) are provided by a range of independent contractors. The nature and range of contractors will vary but whilst there are many dentists who only offer treatment to private patients, a more common model is a mixed

model of dentists who offer services to private patients but also will contract with the NHS for a specified level of NHS activity. Since the survey was carried out in November 2020 there have been a number of developments which could have significantly altered the type of response. The following service changes and developments have occurred since November 2020;

1. Additional urgent and ongoing care slots have been agreed with dental practices across Powys.
2. A new urgent contract has been awarded to a dental practice in Rhayader.
3. A new ventilation system has been installed in the general dental service based in Builth Wells. This now means that the service can carry out AGPs.
4. The refurbishment of Llandrindod Wells Community Hospital Dental clinics has now been completed, meaning that specialist services can resume and the orthodontic service can now be re-located back into Llandrindod Wells.
5. Welsh Government have issued further metrics and expectations meaning that dental practices have to see two new additional patients per 165K of contract value. Further guidance on access is to be issued shortly by Welsh Government.

Ventilation

Covid-19 can be spread as a result of airborne particles and in order to keep patients safe a fallow time was introduced. However good ventilation can dilute the air meaning that the fallow time can be reduced from 30 minutes to 10 minutes. WG has issued funding to dental practice and Powys THB has matched the funding, this has resulted in many practices improving the ventilation and reducing the time needed between patients following the use of the dental drill. Improved

ventilation increases the number of patients that can be seen during any given session.

Recovery and the Reform Process

New metrics will be introduced in Quarter 3 and 4 which will help maintain and improve access. The reform process will move away from Units of Dental Activity (UDAs) as a measure of performance to a shift towards prevention and a focus of the dental resource on those with the greatest need. Dental teams are carrying out an assessment of the clinical and oral risk need called an ACORN on each patient. This will identify those with low risk and can be recalled less frequently and those with medium and high-risk needs. By shifting the resource, capacity is developed within the system to help ensure that those with the greatest need have access. The recovery process will take time to develop and once the pandemic is over data will be received to profile each of our dental practice's patient profile.

Skill Mixing

As with general medical practice, dentistry is starting to develop skill mixing. The existing contract has arguably made this more difficult. The current contract reform process will allow more flexibility to deliver the care to patients which will ultimately benefit the patients. Skill mixing will require careful workforce planning which is led by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) across Wales.

Innovation funding

Shortly before the pandemic Welsh Government made additional funds available through a bidding process meaning that, if successful, a practice could secure funding to recruit additional staff such as a dental nurse or dental therapist to develop new

ways of working, through skill mixing. Powys was successful with two bids.

In responding to the CHC Recommendations, the Health Board recognised the need for additional information for public communication to support access. The Health Board will review its web pages and social media to maximise the information on dental access. The Health Board will also be recruiting additional team members to establish a dedicated public dental telephone helpline to further assist patients who require a dentist or access.

The Health Board has developed an Improvement Plan which has been shared with the CHC. The CHC will be monitoring actions against this plan.

As a Health Board a key priority across any area of health will be prevention and maintaining health and well-being, as opposed to just managing 'health illnesses'. With regards prevention, one of the new metrics introduced for the summer/autumn period, is to ensure that fluoride is applied to both adults and children who are in the red or amber category for tooth decay. Fluoride is well known to stop or slow down the progress of decay and the type of fluoride applied in prescription strength varnish.

The Community Dental Service led 'Designed to Smile' programme, which is a supervised tooth brush programme for primary and nursery children, is due to re-start in September. 'Gwên am Byth' which is a programme to promote and support good oral health care for people living in both residential and nursing homes, led by the community dental service, is also recovering.

With regards to backlog, current data shows that the number of urgent courses of treatment are now at pre-pandemic levels and activity continues to increase. It is anticipated that the reform

programme will further improve access. As outlined previously, dental teams have to follow wider UK Infection and protection guidance and, while things such as social distancing remain in place, throughput is reduced.

As with any health service, the key factor is the need for suitably skilled workforce. There are likely to be increased numbers of dentists retiring earlier and some dental schools may not be able to graduate the same number of dentists, hygienists and therapists as in previous years. Hence there are a number of unknown variables. The ceasing of UDAs and the potential to develop new ways of working may attract more dentists back into the NHS. The current plan to maintain and recruit dentists into Powys continues to develop. This includes: -

- Foundation training places (currently 3 posts in Powys)
- Dental Core training posts
- Exploring the possibility of having dental student placements in Powys
- The expansion of the new Bangor Teaching Unit in North Wales
- Powys Community Dental Service in recent years has developed and expanded specialist services which helps to provide support for general dental practitioners meaning that they do not feel clinically isolated
- Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) have placed Quality Improvement Tutors and Powys CDS have developed links to provide local training and support to general dental practice teams. Powys will continue to review and monitor the General Dental Services (GDS) contract through its internal monitoring group linking with the Local Dental Committee (LDC) and work with existing contract holders and any potentially interested new contract holders across the dental provider community. As and when Welsh Government issues further guidance around the reform process, Powys THB will ensure that general dental services are fully engaged, progressing skill mixing, prevention and moving the resource to those with the greatest need.

Appendix A

Letter from Llandrindod Wells Town Council

	<p>Llandrindod Wells Town Council Old Town Hall, Temple Street, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5DL</p> <p>Telephone - 01597 823116 Email - llandrindodcouncil@btconnect.com Website - www.llandrindod.co.uk</p>
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25th November 2020

Powys Teaching Health Board

Bronllys Hospital

Bronllys

Brecon

Powys LD3 OLU

Dear

Re: NHS Dental Provision Crisis in Powys

At the last meeting of the Town Council held on 17th November, 2020 concern was expressed about the lack of dental provision in Llandrindod Wells and the whole of Powys. This has resulted in many people locally being unable to get access to a dentist.

A recent report was released referring to the impact of Covid 19 on dentistry provision and the difficulties being experienced by dentistry businesses all over the country. The report indicated the possible calamitous effects this could have on dentistry nationwide.

The local provision has fallen short over the last decade, and despite promises to address the issue nothing tangible seems to have been done.

The local NHS Dentistry provision has been failing for a long time prior to Covid 19 and was probably already in crisis. However, since the Covid 19 pandemic, local dentistry provision has as good as collapsed. This failure to supply adequate service provision is having a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of the local residents.

It has been noted that contracting out to My Dentist Group for all or the majority of the provision is failing the local population and probably preventing other independent providers from filling the shortfall which needs to be addressed.

The My Dentist Group mainly seems to be staffed by newly qualified dentists who do not remain in post for very long. This causes a knock on staffing problem and perpetuates the lack of cover.

Llandrindod Wells Town Council feels there are solutions available which should be explored by the Powys Teaching Health Board to ensure that adequate provision is in place for all residents of Llandrindod Wells and Powys as a whole.

This could involve opening up the supply of provisions to other providers, large and small. Encouragement could be given to smaller service providers who will stay and remain long term in the area to prevent valuable workers from leaving. Incentives for small operators to locate and set up in Powys could be offered.

An increase could be introduced in the capacity of the Cardiff School of Dentistry with places offered subject to working in the NHS dentistry field. We feel consideration should also be given to setting up a second school of Dentistry in Mid or North Wales; the former Coleg Powys building in Llandrindod Wells remains empty and would make an ideal training facility.

We would like to see Welsh Government promoting through education, the opportunities for school leavers to consider dentistry as a profession, and would encourage Government funding to support training, and better access to dental colleges/ training providers. Bursaries to local school leavers could be introduced to facilitate their training, on the condition they return and practice within Powys.

The Town Council would urge Powys Teaching Health Board to take urgent action on the issues addressed above and would be interested to have your response on this as this is a matter of great concern to our members and residents.

Yours sincerely

J Johnston

Jane Johnston PSLCC, CiLCA (Wales)

Town Clerk

Llandrindod Wells Town Council

Copies to: Vaughan Gething AM
 Matt Hancock MP
 Kirsty Williams AM
 Fay Jones MP
 Powys Town & Community Councils
 Powys County Councillors

Response from Powys Teaching Health Board to Llandrindod Wells Town Council

Jane Johnston

CiLCA

Town Clerk

Llandrindod Wells Town Council

10th December 2020

Dear Ms Johnston,

Thank you for your letter dated 25th November 2020 to Adrian Osborne. I understand Adrian acknowledged the letter and confirmed that he had passed the letter to me to respond.

I note the concern of the Town Council in your recent meeting regarding dental provision in Powys and specifically the town of Llandrindod Wells. I am not aware of the national report you allude to but I can agree that the Covid 19 pandemic has brought immense challenges to all health sectors including general dental practitioners (GDPs). When the Covid pandemic came upon us in March 2020 a Welsh Government position clarified the role of dentistry in the first wave.

The service was placed in a 'red status' meaning routine dental work was halted nationally, however practices remained open to address urgent dental problems. In the summer of 2020 this was moved to an improved 'amber status' allowing dentists to increase their offer to patients, albeit with specific limitations. As you will understand this has reduced the immediate offer to patients across Wales.

An additional and specific challenge for GDPs, which I will expand on later, is that a large portion of their normal clinical work involves what is known as Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs). The approach necessary in managing these AGPs in a dental room involves additional PPE, cleaning regimes, air circulation and also "fallow time" between patients. Throughput of patients through a clinic is therefore markedly reduced in dentistry at this time, by as much as 60% reduction, to ensure patient and staff safety.

Your letter provides the view of Council that the service in mid Powys has been *“failing for a long time”* and *“that nothing tangible has been done”* thus my response aims to update you on the actions that have been taken in recent years, as well as those planned in the coming months to continue to improve the situation during the pandemic and also for once the pandemic has ended.

I feel it might be helpful at this stage to explain how the dental contract functions. National Health Service GPs are independent contractors who are contracted to provide a level of activity over a 12-month period. The practice may not be able to deliver the activity in that year due to a variety of reasons, with recruitment being one of the reasons. Under the GDS rules and regulations, however a provider cannot have the contract reduced in value unless they either agree to this or that they have failed to deliver the contract over more than one year. This means that if a practice is not able to deliver the level of activity in year one, the contract remains in place and funding is still committed. The advantage of this is that it provides security for a provider if the issue is of a temporary nature and encourages practices to remain in business but a Health Board cannot terminate a contract due to one year of lower than planned activity. This mechanism will be particularly relevant in this year when practices have not been able to deliver their historical levels.

From April 1st 2021, it is expected that practices will also embrace the national programme of dental contract reform. Contract reform is less focused on the currency of UDAs (Units of Dental Activity) and instead provides flexibility to GPs to focus on those with most need and risk to be seen more frequently according to that need. The contract also allows the whole dental team to be utilized. This will inevitably help with access as we move away from routine 6 monthly check ups, which is not evidence based, to a needs-based approach. This means that low needs patients are seen less frequently to increase capacity for the practice. There will also be the potential for greater use of technology such for virtual appointments to generate efficiencies, with for example low needs patients having a “check in” rather than have a “check-up”.

You are correct that mid Powys has faced specific challenges in recent years and it has been a priority of the Health Board to improve that situation. Efforts prior to Covid had been yielding benefits, albeit they will not be fully realised until after the Covid pandemic. Within Llandrindod, I accept the My Dentist practice has been challenged and has struggled with recruitment. This has seen the level of provision drop from the previous levels and currently there is only one permanent dentist. The Health Board continues to be in regular dialogue with the My Dentist leadership to understand their plans for improvement of access.

As you are probably aware the My Dentist contract in Glan Irfon, Builth Wells, was handed back to the Health Board in 2018. With no interest from other independent GPs, the Health Board took it over as a managed practice and a strategy was implemented to develop a service which would not only increase

access for the local population but also improve recruitment and retention of the dental work force by additionally having the practice designated an approved training practice for newly qualified dentists.

As a result of that strategy, I am pleased to confirm that as of August 2020, the practice is now fully staffed with a full time salaried general dental practitioner, one part time senior salaried dental officer, a full time newly qualified dentist, a part-time foundation plus dentist who as well as providing general dental services is developing enhanced skills in oral surgery, a full-time dental therapist and a newly appointed innovation dental nurse.

As I mentioned earlier in this response, the high frequency of AGPs in dentistry necessitates a combination of PPE, fallow time, air circulation and potentially mechanical air handling to ensure safety. This is a particular challenge in Glan Irfon and is an infrastructure problem which could not have been foreseen, which does require mechanical air ventilation. I can re-assure you that the estates team are working closely with the building landlord to rectify this problem as soon as possible, this will allow the team to provide the full range of procedures which generate aerosols.

The Health Board remains acutely aware of the need to continually seek to improve access options and has recently agreed to seek, via a tender process a GDP who will provide additional capacity in the mid of the county for patients who require definitive timely urgent access to treatment. It is expected this will be in place for April 1st 2021.

Whilst your letter does not specifically mention specialised dentistry I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on other developments. You may be aware that the recent Llandrindod War Memorial Hospital refurbishment includes the provision of two new dental 'chairs' (ie clinics). Whilst this work has been slightly delayed we are hopeful they will be available soon and these clinics will be able to provide specialist services and accept referrals for patients who require enhanced and specialist treatment that is not within the scope of their general dental practitioner.

With regard to your comment around dental schools, whilst I welcome any ideas or suggestions, this is not within the gift of Powys THB and in all honesty would be unlikely to be given any serious consideration by relevant medical academic and professional bodies considering that there are no universities within Powys. I have however already noted that the Health Board has developed career posts which aid retention and recruitment of dentists and other members of the dental team.

I wish to assure you that the drive to improve access to dental care across Powys, and not solely to the mid Powys area is a priority for the Health Board. We will continue with our plans as outlined and seek

every opportunity to attract professionals to work in Powys either as an independent contractor or within the Health Board if necessary.

There are some exciting developments underway and although the pandemic has hindered progress considerably I can re-assure all concerned that Powys THB is investing significant resources and supporting the national contract reform programme and hopefully dental access will continue to improve in the coming new year.

I hope at this stage my letter provides you with an update on the position. I note that your letter was copied to a number of people or elected officials. I will share this with the named officials and any whom have contacted us in support of your email. You are of course free to share this letter wider to any other individuals whom you shared your letter with.

Your Sincerely



Jamie Marchant

Executive Director Primary, Community Care and Mental Health Services

Cc: Vaughan Gething AM

Kirsty Williams AM

Fay Jones MP

Cllr Williams

Appendix B

Dental Practice Survey

Powys Community Health Council

Dental Practice Survey

February 2021

Powys CHC is undertaking a project about NHS dental services in Powys during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are gathering information from Powys Teaching Health Board, dental practices and from patients in order to gain an understanding of how NHS dental services are operating and the impact this is having on patients who require dental services.

We understand the pandemic has changed everything and that current practices may not reflect normal practice.

We would be very grateful if you could complete this survey which will provide us with valuable information about dental services in Powys.

1. Name and Address of Practice

2. Do you currently have staff vacancies within your Practice?

No

Yes (please provide number and type of vacancy)

3. Do you have your own Practice website?

No

Yes (please provide website address)

4. If you have a website, does it meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1)?

Yes

No

See following link for further information -

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

You can check your website by using the following tool:

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools/>

5. Do you have any dedicated Practice social media pages?

No

Yes (please provide page name(s))

6. How often do you update your website or social media?

Daily

Weekly

Other

7. Do you maintain a list of registered NHS patients to whom you provide regular or ongoing treatment or care?

Yes

No

8. How are you keeping patients informed and updated about dental services during the COVID-19 pandemic? (please tick all that apply)

By letter/information posted out to patients

By email

By text message

Information on website

Information on social media

Notices outside entrance to practice

Answerphone/introductory message on practice telephone

Signpost to NHS 111 Wales

Not providing updates

Other method (please provide details)

9. Is information you provide to patients available in different formats and languages (eg large print, easy read, audio file, Braille, BSL, Welsh, etc)?

No

Yes (please provide details)

10. Are you accepting new NHS patients onto your patient list?
(please tick)

Accepting Adults Only

Accepting Children Only

Accepting Adults and Children

No – we are not able to accept new NHS patients

11. If you are not accepting new NHS patients, please explain the reason(s) for this

12. What treatments / types of appointment are you offering to NHS patients at this current time (please tick all that apply)

Same day urgent/emergency treatment
Treatment for patients experiencing pain (please state waiting time if not same day)

Aerosol Generating Procedures

Intraoral X-rays

Extraoral X-rays

Routine assessments/checks

Telephone consultations

Video consultations

Other treatment (please list)

13. Are you able to provide NHS treatment to patients who are **not** registered with your Practice?

Yes - but only for patients experiencing pain or urgent dental problem

Yes - on referral from Health Board dental helpline/ NHS 111

Yes - for any NHS treatment required

No

14. If you are carrying out routine assessment/checks, how are these appointments made? (please tick all that apply)

Send appointments out to patients by post

Send appointments by text

Send appointments by email

Offer online booking for patients

Offer text booking for patients

Ask patients to telephone to book an appointment

Other method (please provide details including other formats and languages)

15. Do you use text reminders for patient appointments?

Yes

No

16. Are you using a triage system for patient requests for appointments?

No

On NHS 111 Referral only

Yes (please state who undertakes the triage)

17. Is triage offered at the initial patient call or is it a call back service?

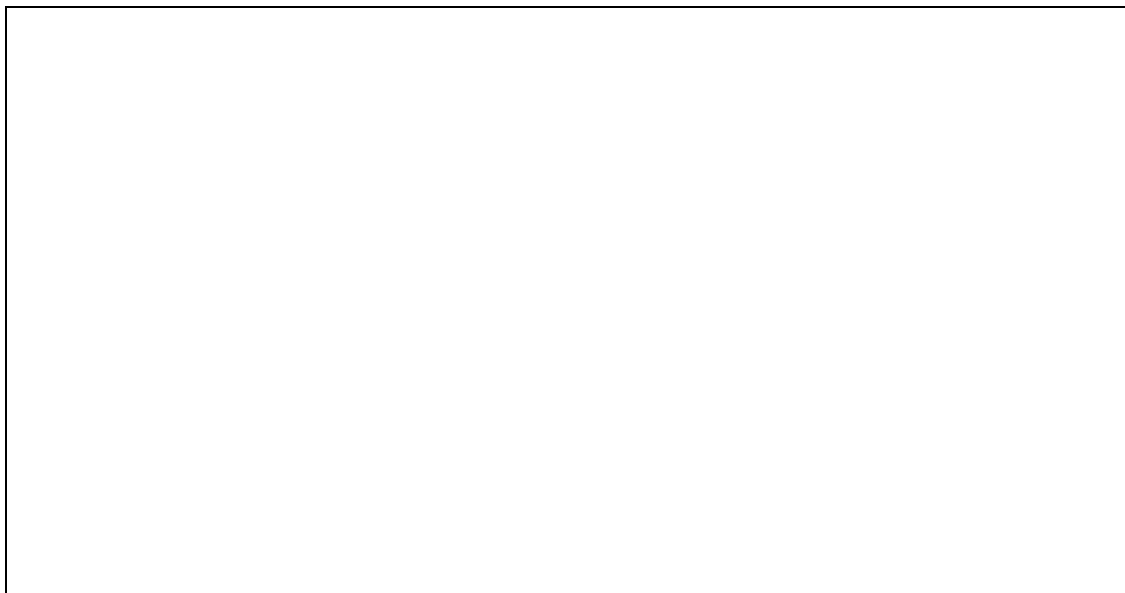
- Triage at point of call
- Call back same day
- Call back next day

18. When a patient is given an appointment to attend your Practice, please explain what information you provide that will reassure patients that it is safe for them to visit and explain how the information is given and in what format it is available

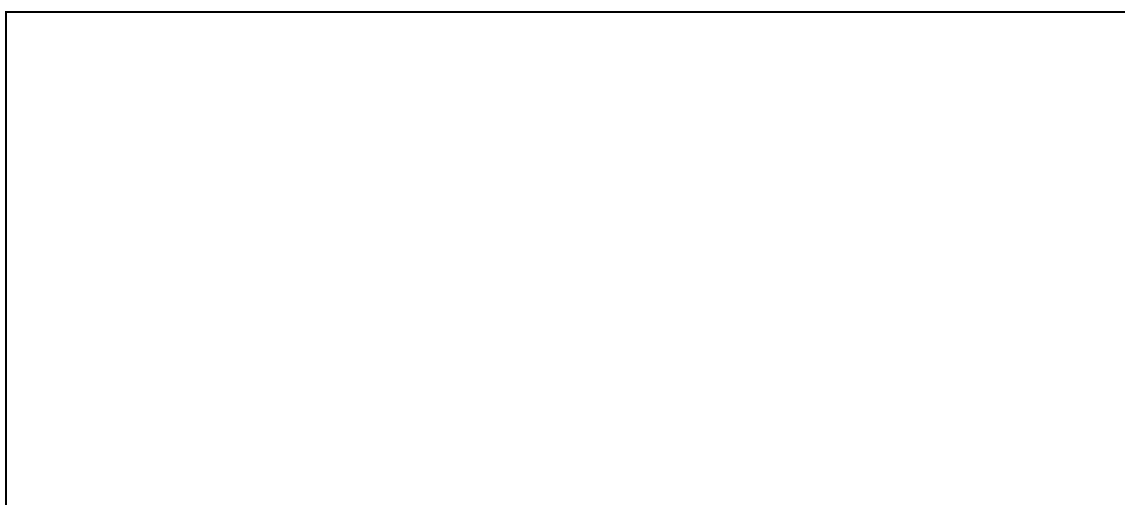
19. Have you used any live translation services?

- No
- Yes (please list services used)

20. Please describe the physical access to your Practice, in terms of physical disability and sensory loss (ie level access, assisted doors, signage in different formats and languages etc)



21. Any other comments or information you wish to provide about your Practice



THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY

Thanks

We thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experiences with us about their health and care services and to share their ideas.

We hope the feedback people have taken time to share influences healthcare services to recognise and value what they do well – and take action where they need to as quickly as they can to make things better.

Feedback

We'd love to hear what you think about this publication, and any suggestions about how we could have improved it, so we can use this to make our future work better.



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