

Newsletter Issue 7



26 June 2020

Welcome to the Healthwatch City of London newsletter

Dear Reader,

As lockdown eases and we begin to return to a new normal in many areas of our lives, Health and Social care services have been working hard to get services back to 'normal' too. At HWCOL we are working with the CCG and Local Authorities to ensure that you have the latest information on how to access Health and Social Care services across the City. What the planned changes mean to us and how can we make sure that they meet the needs of the City will be of paramount importance to us all. Over the coming weeks we will be working with Health and Social partners care to establish what normal looks like and how we can shape it with your help.

The newsletter highlights the work carried on provision of dental services in the City of London and its surrounds during Lockdown. Our thanks to Stuart Mackenzie on producing such a thorough report. Dental services are still an area of concern as not all are open and we hear anecdotally that some of you are still finding access difficult.

This month would have seen us holding our Annual Public Meeting which due to the pandemic we have had to cancel. Our Annual Report which would have been presented at that meeting will be published in early July. Looking back on what has turned out to be a memorable year for all of us it is clear that the increase in digitalisation of services, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic needs to be carefully monitored to make sure that services are fit for purposes and do not marginalise the many who have limited or no access to the necessary IT. We include our own service is this as we to have struggled to get news out there. Please do share our Newsletter with some one who has no access to email. A simple sharing or putting something on your local notice helps us to reach a wider audience.

Stay safe

Gail Beer, Chair Healthwatch City of London

Survey of dentists and dental services in the City of London and Hackney - 20-22 May 2020

At the height of lockdown one of our Associate Board Members conducted a survey of dentists and dental practices in the City of London area. Below you will find the key points from the initial survey. Since the survey was carried out, NHS England's Chief Dental Officer

had asked all dental practices to start opening from Monday 8th June. HWCOL subsequently undertook a quick phone around of a representative sample of NHS, private and mixed practices on 9 June, this revealed no practices were open for routine appointments and treatment. They were all trying to do their best to help patients in pain and/or needing urgent or emergency care. You can read more on the [follow up survey](#) here.

Initial survey (20th – 22nd May)

In our survey, 23 dental practices and hospital dental departments were contacted between 20th and 22nd May, within the City of London and Hackney areas. There were reasonable conversations with fifteen of them; one brief conversation and a referral to a website; five had answerphone messages, two of which had extension phone numbers, which did not respond; and two practices did not respond at all.

Key points

All dental practices are closed with no-face-to-face contact or routine appointments on the advice of one or more of the following - NHS England, Public Health England, British Dental Association, General Dental Council. When and how they will re-open, what extra Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) will be needed etc. will depend and rely on these organisations for guidance. Some practices reported difficulties getting PPE, even though it had been ordered some time ago. They believe the NHS has understandably taken priority. As well as the obvious health concerns for patients, dentists, and support staff, there is also the key issue of indemnity insurance cover.

Most practices have someone answering the phone during normal working hours, Monday to Friday, to provide advice and issue prescriptions (the few not answering could well have staffing/costs problems).

Some have contact arrangements outside these hours. Patients with severe pain, or who have an emergency, can be initially triaged by the surgeries if a dentist is available, usually only during normal working hours.

Outside these hours, and especially weekends, they are told to contact NHS 111, or go to their nearest A&E.

Patients can of course contact their GP, maybe for advice or a painkiller, but if the problem is serious, the GP is likely to recommend NHS 111 or A&E. There has been anecdotal evidence that the quality of some NHS 111 responders has not been good as more experienced professionals are working in critical care etc.

Some practices have been quite good at contacting existing patients, especially those with upcoming appointments, and known ongoing serious conditions. They have used text, email and mail where appropriate. An enterprising few have used social media such as FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp and Zoom to make an audio-visual assessment of a patient's condition/problem. But overall, there did not seem to be a significant proactive move to utilise modern communication tools. This may well change in the near future.

There are currently no urgent dental care hubs within the City of London and Hackney areas. Only one dentist mentioned that the nearest were The Royal London, Whipps Cross and Guy's Hospitals. This raises questions such as the time, distance and cost of travel to them, especially if public transport, a private vehicle or even a taxi are not options for vulnerable, self isolating or shielding, often older patients in considerable pain. In desperation, some people had called 999 to try and get an ambulance to A&E.

One dental nurse said she had just been told that a special fast track code has been issued for patients in severe pain to quote when calling NHS 111. We need to check this out further as there has been anecdotal evidence that the quality of response by some NHS 111 call takers has not been particularly good as more experienced professionals are working in critical care etc.

Some responses from the practices, and dental hospital switchboards, by staff and answerphone, were not easy to hear or follow. Messages must be repeated, especially telephone numbers, and email addresses. There is a real need for better training, and using response staff with clear, measured voices. It is critical for those with hearing difficulties, who may only have a telephone for communication. This matter is extremely important right now because getting and understanding information helps to reduce unnecessary distress and avoids wasting everybody's time.

Many of the issues above highlight the particular difficulties, mental and physical distress that people with special needs and those living on their own experience in getting help with dental and other health problems.

They are often elderly with no close neighbours, relatives or friends. It puts increased responsibility on carers, and local community organisations to check on the needs and well-being of such individuals.

The other related concern is that many people, not only the elderly, do not have a computer, tablet or smartphone, so are unable to utilise email, text services, social media or access a website, and therefore reliant on the normal post and person-to person contact.

When and how dentists will eventually re-open depends on crucial IPC and PPE. They will need to spatially reorganise their practices, train staff, and fully implement necessary testing and cleaning protocols. Also, there have been hints that some mixed NHS/Private practices may have to prioritise private rather than NHS patients when they open their doors again.

Unsurprisingly, there are very few NHS dental practices in the City of London. Most are in Hackney.

And finally, just a comment about websites. The NHS Find a Dentist, NHS Choices websites are very good, although the moveable search map in some related sections is not particularly user friendly.

The CQC website, although comprehensive, lists dentists within the shortest radius choice of five miles. From the Barbican station area, 788 practices are listed. 567 have been inspected and 221 have not been. Whether these practices are NHS, private or mixed is not indicated

up-front on the entries, and only sometimes mentioned in the attached detailed visit reports.

The City of London Corporation main website only mentions its own services, not others like dentists. The Corporation's Family and Young People Information Service website lists some dentists in its area, but recommends the use of NHS Choices website.

Medical appointments

One of our Board Members has recently experienced a swift response in appointments at the Neaman surgery and in follow up appointments. From this experience we advise you to make appointments as soon as possible.

On 2nd June the GP sent a request to book appointment for annual medication review. He called the surgery late AM/early PM on 9th June and was given an appointment for the next morning.

On 10th June the medication review was carried out, when he also mentioned to Dr that he probably needed a new right hip. The doctor made an appointment for him to attend for blood tests on 18th June and advised while he was there to pick up request for a hip X ray.

The blood tests were taken early morning on 18th June when he was given a form for an X ray. Our Board Member immediately went to Bart's, where he booked in about 10.15am, had the X ray about 10.35am and was home about 10.55am. Following this experience, our Board Member states, " I see nothing wrong with this sort of time scale, definitely quicker than it would have been 6 or 12 months ago. Then I would have waited 3 weeks for a GP appointment, not sure how long for an X Ray but doubt if it would have been on same day."

Test and Trace scam

Please be aware that in circulation are some fake messages both on social media and being sent direct to mobile phones, claiming to be from the Governments Test and Trace programme. This is the governments guidance on [how it works](#). To report or identify a scam, the City of London Police provide an Action Fraud Alert service, you can also register for email updates <https://www.actionfraudalert.co.uk/> Please also be aware of scams relating to Covid-19, here is a useful guide from the Met Police

<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/c19/coronavirus-covid-19/fraud-and-scams/>

NICE recruiting 'lay members'

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) are recruiting a lay member to join their Diagnostics Advisory Committee who will contribute to developing and updating NICE Diagnostics guidance for 3 years.

NICE produces guidance on the most effective ways to prevent, diagnose and treat disease and ill health, and provide social care support. Their guidance is based on research evidence

and takes into account the views of people working in or using relevant services, and other stakeholder groups. They are looking for members of the public (referred to as 'lay members') to join the Diagnostics Advisory Committee who will help to develop and update NICE guidance on a range of different diagnostic technologies.

Please see the [recruitment advert](#) for details of what working with the committee involves, the kind of experience and knowledge they are looking for, and how to apply. Recruitment is open until 5pm on Tuesday 21 July 2020.

More information about the Diagnostics Advisory Committee and its current members is [available from the NICE website](#).

Updated government advice on shielding

Millions of people shielding from coronavirus (COVID-19) will be advised they can spend more time outside their homes from Monday 6 July, the Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock has announced.

Read the Government's updated [guidance here](#)

Get in touch with Healthwatch City of London

Visit our website for more information, news and events, have your say about your care, and spread the word about Healthwatch City of London.

Are you interested in becoming a Trustee at HWCOL? We are currently looking for two Trustees. If you are interested, please contact Gail Beer, Chair on gail@healthwatchcityoflondon.org to find out more about the roles.

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