

Access to NHS dental services

Care Home residents and Domiciliary Care customers

What did we do?

We worked with Wiltshire Care Partnership to develop and circulate a survey to their members, including managers of both residential care homes and domiciliary care agencies, to find out whether their residents or the people in their care can access NHS dental services.

Why did we do it?

During an “Enter & View” visit to a local residential care home, a Healthwatch Wiltshire volunteer was told by a resident that he was unable to access NHS dental services, as only private dentists were willing to visit the home. This is an important issue, affecting a person’s general health, nutrition, speech and dignity, and has been highlighted nationally by Healthwatch England. We decided to investigate the position county wide.

What did people say?

- Nine out of the thirteen residential homes who responded reported experiencing problems accessing NHS dental services for their residents, and only six reported that NHS dentists visit their home.**
- They said there were long waiting times for dental visits to the homes, and home visits were only reluctantly available.
- Two respondents said they had experienced difficulties in accessing appropriate services for residents living with dementia.
- Positive feedback was received about community dental staff when they did attend to care for a patient.

** The number of respondents to the survey is not sufficient for us to claim that the opinions expressed are representative of the entire population of Wiltshire. However, feedback provided to the Healthwatch network nationwide is nonetheless significant, and is likely to be a fair reflection of people’s experiences.

What happened next?

Healthwatch England is investigating this issue nationwide. We submitted our findings to them, to NHS England who commission dental services locally, and to Wiltshire Council Public Health. We then met with the commissioners, and discussed our findings. As a result, we have put together a guidance leaflet which is available on the [Your Care Your Support website](#) and the [Healthwatch Wiltshire website](#). The Commissioners are considering setting up local Dental Networks, and Healthwatch Wiltshire would be willing to send volunteer Patient Representatives if this idea goes ahead. Public Health also agreed to contact Wiltshire Care Partnership about participating in their next Conference.

What was the impact?

Professionals and members of the local community are now better informed about their right to treatment, and what is available for them. Healthwatch Wiltshire will continue to monitor the situation, and consider an “Enter and View” visit to a dental practice.