

Written evidence submitted by Healthwatch East Riding of Yorkshire (DTY0015)

Almost 30% of calls received each quarter in the year 22-23 relate to dentistry and the lack of access.

The majority of these relate to elderly patients who have been removed as NHS patients from dentists giving up NHS contracts in favour of private work.

Key trends –

- Lack of access to a NHS dentist
- Problems escalating due to the unavailability of NHS dentists
- Patients living with untreated symptoms as they are unable to get access and therefore creating further pressure on the system when symptoms get worse and they seek help for more serious dental problems
- Children left unseen.

Case studies

Case study 1: Untreated problem causing rotting teeth and social isolation

“I have been looking for a dentist to accept me on a waiting list for some time as are many, I am still not receiving any treatment and to say my teeth are in a bad way is an understatement, I have lost many and have teeth rotting, and teeth that have broken off from lack of treatment. This has carried through to the issues of mental health as I don't smile I don't do social activities, I go to work and go home, it's breaking my heart as me and my young child are missing out on so much as I find it hard to face people in public I am in my 50s I do not drive and was a very outgoing person now I am not, it the 1st time I've opened up about this.”

Case study 2: Elderly person unable to access dentist since moving to area

Elderly patient moved to the East Riding area some time ago and has been in pain with toothache but unable to find a dentist who could help due to long waiting lists. Patient said that their toothache was now causing them to have severe headaches and they needed to find a dentist who would treat them on the NHS.

Case study 3: Child left stranded after orthodontic branch closed

My child had braces fitted and was last seen 5 months ago where we were informed that the local orthodontic branch was closing and that we would receive a letter within 1-2 weeks detailing where he would receive treatment from. Since then I have been in contact with NHS England and the referral centre (01134931921) both of which are unable to do anything besides pass our details on (who to I don't know as I am never given a name/number to chase this myself) and I never hear anything back. I call every few weeks to follow up. Today I was told to call around local practices to see if anyone would do a 1 off adjustment (they won't). I was told by one practice that it is referral centre who will reallocate urgent/priority cases, I have spoken to referral centre again and they still say that it is NHS England who will reallocate spaces.

My son hasn't been seen for 5 months, we have had no communication from anyone detailing when/where he might be seen and he is wearing braces that need adjusting.

Healthwatch East Riding of Yorkshire Action

For all dentist related enquiries, we referred the individuals to the NHS England customer contact centre telephone and email system as NHS England commission dental services throughout the UK and are responsible for the provision of such. We also informed the individuals that if they experience any pain, swelling or serious dental issues then they should contact NHS 111 who will refer them onto emergency treatment.

What we want to change

- Universal availability for better local dentistry
- Better accessible communication
- Patients shouldn't be left in limbo there needs to be an access pathway to complete treatment

Jan 2023