

Written evidence submitted by Gill Furniss MP (DTY0028)

I am writing to submit evidence for the Health and Social Care Committee's enquiry into NHS Dentistry. My evidence is shaped by the significant level of concerned contact I have had in recent months from constituents who cannot access NHS Dentistry. It is their experiences that shape this submission. My constituency of Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough has some of the most severe health inequalities in the Country and I am greatly concerned about the steps that need to be taken to ensure that these inequalities are not worsened by this access issue. Currently, it is close to impossible to register with an NHS dentist within a reasonable distance from my constituency. This is borne out by my casework and research by Healthwatch Sheffield.

This is clearly a widespread issue and both further funding and genuine contract reform are urgently needed. I am particularly worried that unless greatly improved universal access to NHS Dentistry can be achieved, any more modest improvements will not properly benefit areas with serious oral health inequalities such as mine. This is because unlike for GPs, there are no geographic restrictions on where people can register for with an NHS dentist. This would make it very difficult to effectively target any additional capacity towards these areas without this capacity being lost to those registering from areas of lesser need.

Particularly with the transfer of Dentistry commissioning to Integrated Care Boards, consideration should be given to whether some geographical registration restrictions are wise so that local needs can be assessed and addressed. Such a scheme could also bring greater alignment between public health measures and the impacts of local dental practices. ICB oversight of dentistry commissioning, assuming it is properly empowered and funded would be a welcome move as it would give more local visibility to dental commissioning.

I hope this submission is helpful to the committee's work.

Jan 2023