

### **Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 12 July 2023**

#### **NHS DENTISTRY PROVISION**

The committee was attended by members of the Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) Executive.

Suffolk finds itself in a very similar position to many other local authority areas with lack of access to NHS Dentistry for both routine and emergency treatment.

Access to dentistry at a young age reinforces positive dental behaviour and reduces the possibility of poor oral health in later life. Access to routine NHS dentistry for children has been equally negatively affected as adult access to NHS dentistry.

It is widely acknowledged that patients have taken extreme actions to deal with emergency dental problems, such as DIY tooth extraction, this has been highlighted by campaign groups such as toothless in Suffolk, toothless in England and on regional news providers. These DIY interventions leave the individual susceptible to immediate and long-term health complications and place an additional pressure on both primary care (GP surgeries and GP out of hours providers, 111 service) and acute service providers though increased A&E attendances.

#### **ACTIVITY IN SUFFOLK**

In 2021/22, 224300 NHS dental treatments were delivered, the pre pandemic figure was 594000 treatments, this represents a 60% reduction. Post Covid only 37.6% of the population within Suffolk accessed a dentist within the previous two years, the pre covid figure was 52.4%. 31% of Suffolks population attempted to get a dental appointment within the last two years, this is 9 % above the figure for the rest of England.

Research indicates that lack of NHS dental access, disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged in society, including looked after children, those in residential care homes the homeless and those in temporary accommodation.

#### **WORK IN SUFFOLK**

The Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) took over responsibility for the commissioning of NHS dentistry from NHS England in April 2023. The ICB is currently undertaking a short-term commissioning plan which is reviewing the provision of routine and emergency care within its area of operation. Whilst this review is underway, they continue to scope out further opportunities to increase both routine and urgent care provision.

The ICB panel reiterated that their immediate priority is to stabilise the provision of NHS dentistry within the county, particularly prioritising the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged, subsequently they will work to address general access population groups access.

The ICBs intention is to provide 16 additional dental chairs across the county within an 18–24 month timescale. Their medium to long term plan for improvement is heavily reliant on the success of a new dental contract which will be introduced to run alongside the existing 2006 national dental contract. Nationally many Dentists have criticised the 2006 contract, which they state has led to a situation where the NHS dentistry services they provide are more costly than the remuneration they receive. This has subsequently led to a situation where Dentists have handed back their NHS dental contracts and no longer undertake NHS treatment at all. This has occurred within Suffolk as well as nationally.

The new NHS contract is based on a sessional approach, which the ICB believes will lead to a much fairer form of remuneration for NHS dentistry and an overall more attractive proposition to Dentists to undertake NHS work. They believe that this should subsequently lead to better staff retention and therefore an enhanced provision of both routine and urgent dental care within the county.

## **EDUCATION**

Partnership working with the University of Suffolk (UOS) is now underway, where joint funding from Health Education England and the NHS will see the development of a new centre for dental development (DCC), which will be based as the UOS Ipswich campus. The DCC will offer a range of educational courses across the whole dental workforce, which the ICB envisage will provide qualified clinicians to work within this locality. The nearest dental school is in east London. However, it must be noted that any benefits from this plan are only likely to be seen within the medium to long term (2 to 3 years). Included within the DCC contract is the provision of a dental treatment centre at the Ipswich campus which will provide NHS dental treatment to the local Ipswich population. A criteria is been developed by the ICB which will identify which patient groups the centre will be accessible to. The Committee has asked the ICB to look into the feasibility of establishing a similar DCC within West Suffolk, which they accepted as a recommendation, however partner education providers would need to be present in this area for a centre to be established.

## **SUMMARY**

The responsibility to provide NHS dentistry was given to SNEE ICB in April 2023.

There are a number of both national organisational and funding issues that have arisen over a number of years, which have led to a significant reduction in access to NHS dentists for the population of Suffolk.

The ICB are working at pace to try and identify solutions to the many problems that exist within this sector. However, the presence of the national contract and the ongoing issues that exist within it, are likely to exacerbate an already undesirable situation and that in the short term despite the efforts of the ICB, we are unlikely to see significant improvements in NHS dentistry provision within the county.

The SNEE ICB will provide SCC Health Scrutiny Committee with ongoing information bulletins on work undertaken relating to Dentistry and will also attend the committee meeting at a future date as part of the committees forward work plan.

For those members who would like more information on this subject matter please Follow this link.

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/the-council-and-its-committees/committees/health-scrutiny-committee>

Cllr Andrew Martin