

Dental services in Berwick upon Tweed

September 2022

With the MyDentist practice in Castlegate closing at the end of September 2022, we have been hearing concerns from patients in Berwick about the provision of NHS dental services. NHS England has provided us with the following messages for residents of Berwick and the wider area.

- NHS England is acutely aware of the difficulties patients are experiencing in accessing NHS dental care following the closure of the practice in Berwick.
- NHS England is looking at short term solutions to increase access for patients requiring urgent dental care whilst it works on the longer-term solution of securing a new NHS provider in Berwick, both of which are dependent on the availability of the dental workforce.
- Berwick has not been forgotten and NHS England is trying hard to find alternative dentists or services to fill the gap. This includes approaching dentists in other parts of the county to see if they can offer any additional capacity.
- There is an oral surgery outpatient clinic at Berwick Infirmary for referrals from dentists which takes place once per month. These appointments are held in the outpatient department but are not general dental appointments. They will be seen in clinic at Berwick Infirmary for consultation and then if they require a procedure this will be completed at Alnwick Infirmary or another hospital site as there currently isn't a theatre at Berwick. Please note that these are not every day dental procedures but specialist oral surgery referrals. There is no general dental clinic at Berwick Infirmary.
- In the meantime, the best advice is to use NHS111 for urgent or emergency treatment. If after clinical triage, your dental problem is not assessed as being clinically urgent, you will be asked to contact an NHS dental practice and/or given self-care advice until an appointment can be offered.
- When contacting an NHS dental practice it is important that you tell the practice up front what the problem is so that they can determine the urgency of the dental need. NHS England is asking dental providers to prioritise those patients in greatest need into their available appointment slots.
- NHS dental providers will soon be required update the NHS website with availability of NHS provision as part of some recently announced reforms.
- Other changes to come out of the dental contract reform programme include making it easier for practices to use the skills of dental therapists and hygienists to undertake some of the work currently done by dentists. This will free up dentist time to focus on patients with more complex treatment needs.
- The frequency in which you need to attend a dentist for a check-up is based on your oral health – if your teeth and gums are healthy, you may not need to attend as often and this could be up to two years for those with good oral health.

Here at Healthwatch Northumberland we will continue to monitor the experience of patients in the area, make NHS England aware of ongoing issues and press for positive outcomes.

If you would like to tell us about your experiences of dental services please get in touch.