

**Mystery shopper review of Dentists
admissions in Manchester**

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Recommendations

More dental practices should accept new NHS patients to their practices.

The way in which NHS patients are accepted needs to be made clear to all local stakeholders and presented on an annual timeline where possible.

More work needs to be done by Healthwatch Manchester to establish the ratios of NHS to private patients in dental practices in Manchester and to conduct a comparative analysis with the NHS contract in place for Manchester dental practices.

More work needs to be done by Healthwatch Manchester investigating the experience of under 18s in accessing dental care.

1. Introduction

1.1 Key commissioned functions of Healthwatch Manchester(HWM) are to:

- Inform and signpost people to local health and care services
- Respond to and investigate information received from local people regarding these services where there is cause for concern.

1.2 NHS England commissions dental services in England. Therefore, they are required to meet the needs of local populations for both urgent and routine dental care.

1.3 Staff at Healthwatch Manchester noted that our office was receiving a high number of dental related queries across both our telephone address and email address.

1.4 These queries' mainly involving members of the public asking for the details of dental practices that are currently accepting NHS patients.

1.5 HWM wanted to review dental practices patient admissions as a means of mitigation of the inevitable demand of people in the current dental crisis we are in.

1.6 Therefore, the HWM staff decided to begin a 'Mystery Shopper' investigation into all dental practices across Manchester, looking specifically at their patient admissions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Mystery shopper style phone calls were used as the method of investigation. This provided an opportunity for HWM to understand the experience of contacting a dental practice in Manchester to enquire about registering as an NHS private patient.

2.2 HWM values individuals' experiences with, and feelings about, health services. A qualitative method such as this means we can better understand some of the issues patients face.

2.3 HWM conducts investigations with the aim of collecting data that is of practical use. We believe research should be used as a starting point to suggest service improvements.

2.4 HWM staff and volunteers were deployed to conduct this research and analyse its findings. The team were assigned to contact a set number of practices each, roughly 10 per person.

2.5 When attempting to contact the dental practices in the Manchester City area, it was decided that the researcher would call each practice at least twice, waiting on hold a maximum of ten minutes each time.

2.6 When calling each dental practice, the researcher would ask two questions. There was a third question which was asked depending on the answer to the first question.

2.7 The questions were as follows:

- Question 1. Are you accepting any new NHS Patients at this time?

If Yes - Ask Question 2

If No - Can you tell me when you will be doing so?

- Question 2. Are you accepting private patients?

2.8 All of our findings were recorded on individual documents by each person who contacted the practices. These findings were then collated into a spreadsheet (available on request).

2.9 The dental practices in question were called over a period of 8 days by 6 people, comprising of HWM staff and volunteers with the first call happening on the 20th of February 2023.

3. Key Findings

3.1 After completing our mystery shopper research, we found that 46 of the practices we contacted are not currently accepting new NHS patients. This is 78% of the 59 dental practices we contacted.

3.2 Moreover, only 3 practices informed us that they were accepting new NHS patients currently. This is 5% of all the total practices we contacted.

3.3 Furthermore, 4 practices told us that they only accepted people under 18 years old as new NHS patients. This figure stands at 7% of the total number of dental practices we contacted.

3.4 27 practices are taking on private patients currently. This means 46% of all practices are accepting private patients.

3.5 Overall, none of the practices who told us they were not accepting new NHS patients could give an exact timeframe for when they would begin doing so.

3.6 Our findings also show that 24 practices are accepting neither NHS or private patients at this time.

3.7 The term 'Unresponsive' in Figure 1 means the number of practices who did not answer the called when we attempted to call them.

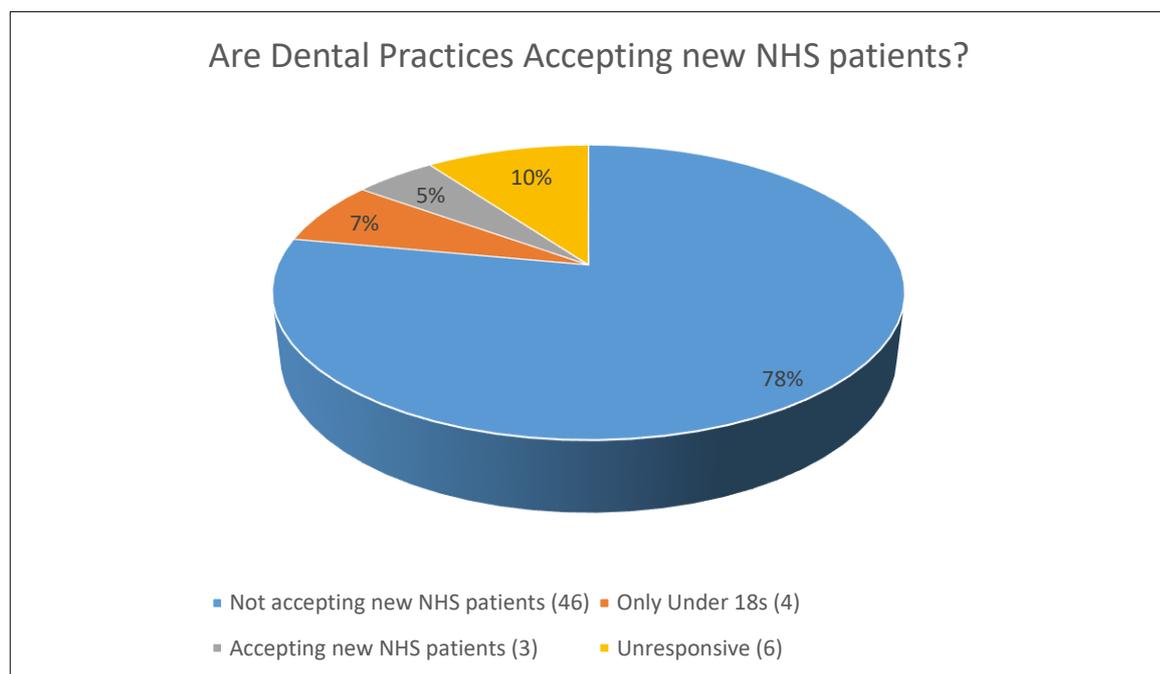


Figure 1

4. Conclusions

4.1 Dentists in Manchester are rarely accepting any new NHS patients to their practices at this current time.

4.2 The vast majority of dental practices didn't have an answer to the question 'When will you be accepting new NHS patients?'.

4.3 Far more dental practices are accepting only private patients as opposed to only NHS patients or a combination of both.

4.4 4 practices informed us that they only admit under 18's as NHS patients.

5. Appendix

A dental practice response list available on request.

6. Acknowledgements

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