

HEALTHWATCH  
REDCAR & CLEVELAND

**Dental Health Care  
Access for the Disabled & Infirm**  
August 2014

Author: R W Norton  
Executive Board Member  
Healthwatch  
Redcar & Cleveland

5<sup>th</sup> August 2014

**INTRODUCTION**

The author attended a NHS event in Durham on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 where the health topic was on Improving Dental Care and Oral Health. The event, organised by NHS England was designed to engage stakeholders as users of dental services to give their, or those they represent, views and or experiences on dental services. Dentists working in general dentist practice are not NHS employees. They are independent providers from whom the NHS commission services. The NHS spends c£3.4bn per year on dental services. 21 Dental Local Professional Networks have been recently established across England to promote a strategic, clinically informed network approach to the planning and delivery of dental services that reflect the needs of the population. There were several objectives put to the invited audience (for further and more detailed information visit:

<http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/qual-clin-lead/calltoaction/dental-call-to-action/>), they were:

#### Main Objectives:

1. Quality Outcomes and Prevention
2. Reducing Health Inequalities
3. Access (to a dentist)
4. Information for Patients
5. The Pathway Approach & Integrated Care
6. Patient & Public Engagement
7. Workforce

The author of this report was particularly interested in objectives 2 & 3 on the basis of evidence from a Healthwatch member and personal experience. In particular the author noted that his dental practices operated from a first floor premises with the only access available via a staircase. A resident in the Redcar & Cleveland Borough had also reported to Healthwatch that they had experienced some access issues when they attended a dental practice with a disabled person.

The author conducted a straw poll amongst dental practitioners attending the NHS event and discovered that the majority of them operated from premises situated above the ground floor.

If dental practices operate in the main from an upper floor then is this disadvantaging those less able to access the practice and if so what impact is this having on the desire of the NHS to improve dental care and oral health.

Following a brief report from the author to the Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland board it was agreed that a survey would be undertaken in the borough of Redcar & Cleveland to assess access to dental services for the inform and or disabled.

## INVESTIGATION

The author conducted a visual survey of the NHS dental practices registered as operating within the Redcar and Cleveland Borough. Appendix A summarises the results of the survey, with an image of the main practice access point.

### Availability of Dental Services

Notwithstanding the issues around physical access to a dental practice it quickly became apparent that the availability of a NHS dental practice to all areas of the Borough was not evenly distributed. A number of townships within the Borough had no dental practice which meant that travel by public or private transport was required. Notably the more challenging districts appeared to be adversely affected: Southbank, Grangetown and Dormanstown, Ormesby and Brotton who have no registered NHS dental practice within their boundary.

A purpose designed dental surgery with full disabled access in the Normanby Health Village, serving principally Southbank and Grangetown has never been occupied!

Using statistics provided by the R&CBC web site and based on the 2011 census the following is considered noteworthy.

The four districts identified in this report that have no local dental practice represent c24% (c32000) of the population of the Borough (135000) where some c10% of the combined district population is in need of some form of care.

### Dental Practices – Operating Within the Borough

The table below identifies the location and spread of the NHS dental practices operating within the Redcar & Cleveland.

	Redcar	Saltburn	Marske	Guisborough	Skelton	Loftus	Eston	Normanby
NHS Dental Practices	4	1	2	4	2	2	1	1

### Dental Practices – Physical Location

Of the 17 registered practices surveyed there was one practice that delivered domiciliary visits only, and as such had no surgery, leaving sixteen practices accessible to the residents within the borough of Redcar & Cleveland.

### Dental Practices – Alternative Routes to Treatment

Where the patient could not access the dental practice for reasons of health and or disability they could receive treatment at home from one of four (25%) of the sixteen dental practices within the Borough: Normanby, Redcar and Guisborough x 2.

## **Dental Practice – Access for the Disabled or Infirm**

The survey identified two practices (Redcar & Skelton) that were built to disability building regulation standards, where access for wheelchairs users and the infirm could be undertaken without reference to further assistance.

It is worth noting that the building regulations that determine the provision of building access for the disabled applies to all new builds. Altering older buildings to conform to disability building regulations is a complex matter and owners should take advice from a professional builder or the local authority.

Of the remaining fourteen practices surveyed ten practices offered assistance with access that included assistance from members of staff to use of mechanical ramps.

There were four practices that were unable to provide disabled access and limited access for the elderly or infirm.

### **SUMMARY**

In summary this survey identifies:

1. Five major districts within the Borough representing c25% of the Borough's population are denied local access to a dentist. This statistic will impact significantly on the NHS's desire to improve dental and oral health in Redcar & Cleveland.
2. Five of the fourteen dental practices offer home visits in the districts: Skelton, Redcar, Normanby and Guisborough x 2. Which eases the access to dental practice position for the disabled and infirm.
3. Two of the dental practices (Redcar and Skelton) operate within buildings that are specifically designed to facilitate access for wheelchair users, the disabled and or infirm.
4. An analysis of access to the sixteen dental practices within Redcar & Cleveland is summarised as:

Full disabled access (no assistance required)	2
Disabled access (with staff and or mechanical aids assistance)	10
No disabled access facility	04

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That this report be sent to NHS (Dental) as intelligence, and action as appropriate, for their Improving Dental Care & Oral Health programme.
2. That the commissioners for NHS (Dental) services note the absence of dental practices within the Borough affecting c25% of the Borough's population of 135k residents.

That the commissioners for NHS (Dental) services consider the needs of the disabled, infirm and elderly in the Borough.