

New measures to improve access to dental care

- All NHS dentists to receive fairer payments for providing more complex dental care to those who need it most
- Dentists will be required to update NHS website regularly to make it clear which practices are taking on new patients and the services available, improving access
- This will ensure the system better supports all dentists and their teams while also providing better value for money dental care for patients.

A new package of measures to improve patient access to dental care has been introduced by the government.

From today, NHS dentists will receive fairer payments for delivering complex dental care to incentivise practices to take on high needs patients who require treatment the most.

Previously dentists would receive the same payments for all treatments delivered within band two, which includes fillings and tooth extractions, regardless of the amount of time taken to deliver the work. For example, they would receive the same payment for one filling as three fillings.

This meant dentists may not have been able to afford to take on patients who had not seen a dentist for an extended period who require more extensive treatment as a result.

The contract changes, which come into force today, will provide fairer payments to dentists by taking into account the time taken to do the work, incentivising practices to provide the care needed for patients with complex and high needs.

Health Minister Neil O'Brien said:

I am determined to make sure everybody seeking NHS dental care can receive it when they need it.

Our new contract rewards dentists more fairly for taking on high needs patients and delivering treatments to those who need it most.

It will not solve all the problems overnight, but it will help improve access and ensure the system supports dentists and their teams.

The new contract will also require dental practices to regularly update information on the 'Find a Dentist' tool on the NHS website, ensuring it accurately reflects available services. This will help patients to locate practices taking on new patients and access the treatments they need quickly.

This government is also introducing legislation which will provide the General Dental Council (GDC) with greater flexibility to amend its international registration processes for overseas qualified dentists. This will pave the way for additional exams places and enable the GDC to recognise and accept more qualifications for dentists and dental care professionals who want to work in the UK and support a reduction in unnecessary delays.

Louise Ansari, national director of Healthwatch England said:

Thousands of people have spoken up about their struggles accessing an NHS dentist over the last few years, telling us about dental practices in many regions either closing down or not accepting new NHS patients. This announcement shows the power of their voices, with government listening and taking action.

The changes should help people find clear and up to date information on dentists taking on new NHS patients. While people with more complex dental problems will find it easier to access care because of the shift in how the NHS pays dentists. Ultimately, we hope these combined measures will help to reduce long waiting times, the extended periods of pain many people suffer and prevent the extreme cases of DIY dentistry we have seen.

These changes are a good start and when put into practice can help ensure dental care that is accessible and affordable to everyone who needs it.