

Paper 4

The King Centre
Main Road Barleythorpe
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Alicia Kearns MP
By email

20 June 2022

NHS dentistry in Rutland

Dear Ms Kearns

Healthwatch Rutland has been keeping a watching brief on the provision of NHS dental services in Rutland for some time. This prompted a quick poll in January 2022 to understand the public's experiences of accessing and receiving NHS dental care in Rutland. The poll highlighted the challenges people in Rutland face, with many unable to access NHS dentistry and equally unable to pay for private care. We shared the results widely and results of the poll can be found on our website: [Your views on NHS Dental Services | Healthwatch Rutland](#).

On June 7th 2022 we contacted all Rutland dental practices to ask for the availability of NHS planned and urgent appointments. We were dismayed to hear that no Rutland dental practice was taking on adult patients on the NHS for either routine or urgent care. One practice said they have a 'small contract' for NHS care for children but there is a waiting list, and one other practice offers NHS orthodontics for children.

The best advice we received was to contact NHS111 and be prepared to travel for up to 2 hours for urgent care. Unfortunately however, follow up with DHU Healthcare, the provider of local NHS111 services, revealed that operators have great difficulty in finding appointments to which they can direct patients with urgent dental needs. Further to this, one of the private practices in Rutland is not taking on new patients at all because they are at capacity.

The current national financial crisis means that many people are not able to afford private dental care if they need it. Children's dental health, already poorer than the national average pre COVID-19 for under 5's in Rutland, will further deteriorate and those entitled to free dental care cannot access it.

We know that poor dental health can cause serious complications including oral cancer and infection leading to sepsis, in addition to the more obvious, but equally distressing, pain, poor diet, teeth misalignment and loss of self-esteem. There are also potential links to heart attacks, dementia and strokes.

Locally therefore, the Healthwatch Rutland Board has requested that the Rutland Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee schedules an agenda item for external scrutiny of NHS Dental provision in Rutland as a matter of urgency. We have asked the Committee to highlight the grave public concern about the lack of NHS dental care in Rutland and to challenge commissioners to urgently bring forward plans for improving the situation.

Nationally, Healthwatch England have undertaken studies recently that highlight stark failings in NHS dentistry provision across the country, creating the twin crises of access and affordability: [Lack of NHS dental appointments widens health inequalities | Healthwatch](#)

We draw these issues to your attention in the hope and expectation that you can bring influence to bear on the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England/Improvement to urgently reform NHS dental contracts, which, we are told, dentists find unworkable. Fair access to NHS dental services in Rutland needs to be reinstated as a priority in order to treat emergencies, preserve dental health and avoid greater costs and pressures on the NHS in the longer term.

Yours Sincerely



Dr Janet Underwood PhD

Chair, Healthwatch Rutland