

NHS Dental Services in West Norfolk

Alex Stewart, Healthwatch Norfolk

Working in partnership with...



RAF Marham



Norfolk Armed
Forces Covenant
Board



NHS England
(Midlands and
East)



Why did we do this?

- Local anecdotal intelligence and other secondary data sources highlighted concerns around accessing local NHS dental services in West Norfolk. It then became one of our priority project areas
- Scoping exercise carried out and we decided to focus on access to and experiences of NHS dental care for children and young people in West Norfolk
- Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board also approached us with similar issues regarding access to services for the families of serving personnel
- We supported them by offering guidance around survey design so they could get a better understanding of the families experiences
- We continued discussions with the Armed Forces Covenant Board and RAF Marham throughout this project



What did we do?

Parent/guardian survey

- Developed based on the survey designed by Healthwatch Norfolk for RAF Marham and the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board
- All schools in West Norfolk contacted and 20 agreed to support our project by sending out the survey to parents/guardians, via the pupils. This included nurseries, primary schools, high schools and one special educational setting
- Children's Centres, libraries and the Oral Health Promotion Team in West Norfolk also supported us with this
- We did a press release in local news publications, promoted the project on our social media channels and arranged local engagement events

NHS Choices mystery shopping

- Carried out to understand the availability of services in West Norfolk and the accuracy of information presented online, when compared to telephoning the dental services directly



What did we find out? - *Parent/guardian survey*

- Analysis conducted on 314 respondents of the survey, equating to 606 children and young people
- Majority of parents/guardians took their children to the dentist once or twice a year. However, 15% of our respondents have never taken their children to the dentist
- Barriers:
 - **Appointments**
“Took almost 11 months after registering to get our first appointment. Appointments cancelled at short notice after arrangements have been made for time off school/work.”
 - **Availability of services**
“I have not been able to find one local enough to take myself or my daughter under NHS.”
 - **Location and/or transport**
“Got to fit my son’s dentist in when his dad finishes work, as I don’t drive and the local bus to Downham Market is very limited.”
 - **Age of children**
“Have been to register but told they can’t be seen until they are 3 years old???”
 - **Information/advice**
“Advice online seems to be different from advice given at surgery.”



What did we find out? - *NHS Choices mystery shopping*

- Carried out at the end of the project (26 March 2018 - 06 April 2018)



Only three of the 13 “high street” dental practices provided us with information on the telephone that matched the information displayed on their website and/or on the NHS Choices website.

- Who is accepting children...
 - **NHS Choices:** 5/13 accepting, with a further 3/13 accepting as a dental practitioner referral
 - **Websites:** 5/13 didn't have one, 5/13 provided no information and 3/13 stated they weren't accepting children
 - **Telephone:** When calling directly, only 4/13 were accepting children, with one only accepting if their parent/guardian was a paying private customer
- Earliest available appointment for the 4/13 accepting was in 2/3 month's time with the longest wait being 5 months



Summing up findings

- Majority of parents/guardians who take their children to the dentist have a *good* or *very good* experience overall
- Staff members were praised for their positive attitudes towards their children, including being “friendly”, “professional” and “good with children”
- Clear barriers to accessing: availability of services, specifically in the local area, which went hand-in-hand with transport issues; availability and cancellations of appointments; long waits and information/advice
- Findings of inconsistent information and lack of available services, echoed in mystery shopping
- Particular issues noted by RAF Marham families previously, replicated by the personnel families in this survey
- Overall, there is evidence to show there is a much wider problem of access to NHS dental services, not limited to the RAF community but to West Norfolk and possibly beyond



What have we done with the findings so far?

- Met with RAF Marham's Community Development Officer, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board and the NHS England Commissioning Contracts Manager for dental services to discuss next steps
- Working with NHS England Commissioners has enabled us to increase their awareness of the importance of our work and issues faced by those in the area including RAF families
- Began discussions with West Norfolk Community Transport regarding possible routes for military families, as location/transport was a big issue for many
- Supported NHS England with two procurements - Special Care Dentistry and Out of Hours dental services. Helped to facilitate a patient forum and promoted their consultations to our members
- Built relationships with CQC to share intelligence and inform our respective work programmes



What else will we be doing with the findings?

Evidence...	Recommendation/action...
<p>Military families highlighted issues accessing services in the local area, especially given the location of the RAF base, the transient nature of forces families and issues around finding NHS dental services who are accepting patients and then the long waits for appointments.</p> <p>Patients should be able to access a service at the point they left it if they are receiving treatment. Currently, patient records for dental services don't follow the patient if they move.</p>	<p>Using the Armed Forces Covenant, local dentists will be asked to offer places for families of current serving personnel to ensure they are not disadvantaged, as a first step to improving access for families. To achieve this, we recommend that an event is to be held where dentists can attend the Base and offer places where families can "sign up".</p> <p>NHS England to consider patient registration to enable patient records (both military and civilian population) to follow the patient if they were to move or be stationed in a new area.</p>
<p>One of the biggest barriers was the availability of NHS dental services, especially in the local area. This leads to parents being unable to take their children to the dentist, and those who have been able to access NHS dental care still experienced long waits to attend or having to travel further to an available service for their children.</p>	<p>NHS England to consider looking at the current service provision in Norfolk and carrying out an updated Oral Health Needs Assessment.</p>
<p>Inconsistencies and inaccuracies of information provided online (NHS Choices and dental practices own website) were found when telephoning the dental practices in West Norfolk directly. This was highlighted by parents/guardians in the survey and echoed in the "mystery shopping" exercise.</p>	<p>The findings from the "mystery shopping" exercise will be shared with NHS England Midlands and East as they manage the service listings on NHS Choices. When contacting dental practices directly with the feedback we received, we will also share findings specific to their service with the recommendation to update and keep this page updated, given that it is the public-facing resource for finding NHS services in the local area.</p>

- Individual service provider feedback will be shared with the local dental practices (where we have obtained specific feedback) along with the report, for information/comment.
- Service specific feedback will also be added to our internal evidence database and be published on our public-facing website (where we have obtained consent to do so) which will enable the public to make informed decisions about their and their children's dental care.

