

Report to the Health Scrutiny Panel

Unplanned/Urgent Dental Care Review – North East London

Introduction

This paper has been put forward to the Tower Hamlets Health Scrutiny Panel to provide elected members with an update of the activity of the Emergency Dental Services Review, now named the Unplanned/Urgent Dental Care Review.

Within the initial stages of the project, it became clear a strategic approach was required and an unplanned/urgent dental care strategy should be developed across the North East Sector. This activity will ensure the provision of Out of Hours urgent care dental services is based on the needs of the communities in North East London and commissioned in a planned manner. This change in direction was reported verbally to elected members at the Health Scrutiny Meeting held on the 27th January, 2009.

Current Emergency Dental Services

PCTs have been required to commission Out of Hours dental services from April 1st 2006. The services, covering North East London boroughs, consist of a single telephone triage service and two walk in services at the Royal London Hospital and in Hornchurch. The PCTs within North East London all make equal contributions towards the funding of the telephone triage service.

The current Emergency Dental Service (EDS) arrangements include both telephone triage and face-to-face consultation. The service is accessed by a single Out of Hours (OOH) telephone number for the whole of the NE Sector. The calls are triaged by a dentist based in the walk in Centre at the Royal London Hospital. The patient may be offered anything from advice to referral on to a face-to-face consultation at either the Royal London Hospital or Hornchurch. In addition, to accessing the service through triage, there are walk in services provided both at the Royal London Hospital and at the Hornchurch EDS.

Review of North East London Unplanned Dental Care

The aim of the review is to ensure that patients who have unplanned dental care needs will be seen at the right time and in the most appropriate place and the objectives of the review are:

- i.** To ensure that all patients with a true urgent need have access to a clinical contact at an appropriate time.
- ii.** To enable consistent prioritisation of urgency for treatment, i.e. to give priority to patients where a delay in time could have significant impact on the outcome of subsequent treatment;
- iii.** To ensure those patients who need referral are referred to the appropriate service to meet their needs.
- iv.** To ensure urgent dental services provided within the North East Sector are high quality and provide best value of the funding allocation.
- v.** To ensure that the Urgent Dental Service works within a 'whole system' approach to providing urgent dental care in the sector by ensuring effective interfaces and consistent protocols between primary care dental services and all urgent dental care services within the sector.
- vi.** Improve access to urgent dental care services within the Sector.
- vii.** To foster innovation and continuous improvement in all aspects of delivery of urgent care dental services

In order to achieve the aim and objectives a project has been set up with several work streams. An Unplanned Dental Care Steering Group is overseeing the activity and a Senior Project Board is

incorporating a strategic view and ensuring decision making is timely within the seven PCT areas within the North East Sector.

Involvement in Development of the Strategy

The initial review of the EDS Royal London and the Out of Hours Telephone Triage service raised concerns about the patient experience and highlighted the inconsistencies for patients accessing the service. The Unplanned/Urgent Dental Care review has built upon the findings of the original review, incorporating feedback from users of the EDS provided at the Royal London and the Hornchurch site, staff working within the EDS and Triage, a meeting held with the Tower Hamlets Local Involvement Network, the Homeless Centre in Brick Lane E1 and feedback from consultations regarding dentistry where the views are relevant to this activity.

The service is highly thought of by many patients and the staff providing and working within the service are committed to the delivery of good quality urgent dental care, however the following issues have been identified in addition to the access issues reported to elected members on the 27th January:

- **Opening times:** The Out of Hours Telephone Triage starts to accept calls at 6.30 p.m. These calls are initially taken by a Call Handler who logs the patient's details and passes the calls to the Triage Dentist. Dependant on the amount of calls required that evening the patient could find they are waiting one/two hours for a return call and within that period slots have been taken at the EDS, both in the Royal London and Hornchurch.

The EDS Royal London and Hornchurch start providing clinical care at 7.00 p.m. The majority of General Dental Practices close their clinics earlier and therefore there is a gap for a patient trying to access urgent dental care. The majority of patients are accessing both the triage and EDS earlier in the evening.

- **Unmet Need** – Throughout this exercise it is clear there are numbers of patients accessing GPs, Walk-In Centres, A&E, Ambulance Services and the EDS Walk-In services throughout the day to receive treatment for dental health care. Whilst numbers are not kept on a consistent basis by these organisations the figures show a number of patients are not clear on how to access urgent dental care across the sector.
- **Lack of co-ordination between services:** The Emergency Dental Services within the Royal London and the Dental Institute are both based within the Royal London Hospital. Whilst both operate at different times many patients confuse the two services and try to access their appointments/urgent dental care within the wrong service. Both services refer patients they cannot see to the other and therefore patients may, on occasion, find they are unable to access either. There is also a lack of understanding amongst NHS Stakeholders of the roles and responsibilities of both services and therefore patients are often referred to these services when they should be accessing their local Dental Practitioner.
- **Confusion because of name of service:** The services at the Royal London and Hornchurch are presently called Emergency Dental Services (EDS) and this is causing confusion amongst patients and other urgent care services. Those in emergency need should be attending the Emergency Services and those in urgent dental care need should be accessing appointments at their local dentists or the EDS. Patients have also said that because it is called Emergency Dental Services they think it will be open 24 hours and that it will be free.
- **Referral pathways:** The majority of GP Practices, Walk-In Centres and General Dental Practices are all referring patients to the Emergency Dental Services based at the Royal London throughout the day and evening and as a result patients are not being referred locally to General Dental Practices where they can receive ongoing treatment. Whilst some patients are being given the triage telephone number the majority of patients are advised to attend the Walk-In service however have been given incorrect information about opening times and costs.
- **Perception of dental capacity across the sector:** Commissioners and dentists are advising that there is capacity within the majority of the sector for patients with dental need to receive NHS dental care however this conflicts with the patient perception that there is not enough NHS dental provision.

In some areas the capacity has been commissioned however some patients are advising that when they access dentists that provide NHS care they are being advised there are no NHS slots available however they can have a private slot. Whilst it is the role of the Commissioner to ensure the services are monitored this type of miscommunication can cause patients to develop a level of mistrust in dentists. Commissioners wish to improve the mechanisms for capturing this information and ensure patients are able to put forward their concerns when these issues occur however some patients are reticent to complain as they perceive it will affect their care in the future.

- **Lack of Information:** Many of the organisations contacted within this review have advised that the information they have regarding dental care services within the North East is not up to date. As a result patients are often being redirected and on many occasions, often more than once, before they manage to receive dental health care. There is concern that some patients may give up on trying to access services and therefore attend the emergency dental services when they have a problem that is causing pain that cannot be ignored.

These views will shape the proposals for future delivery of unplanned urgent care services across the North East Sector of London.

In Hours Pilot

Whilst the review is not complete Commissioners recognised the need to develop extra urgent dental care capacity to alleviate some of the pressure on the services. An In Hours pilot was taken forward by NHS City & Hackney where next day appointments were commissioned, within GDPs, specifically for patients that had tried to access the Out of Hours service the previous evening and not been successful in gaining an appointment. This pilot proved successful, providing choice for patients and extra capacity and therefore is now being rolled out across the sector. Tower Hamlets has provided the service with specific appointments within William Place General Dental Practice.

Next Steps

The Senior Project Board is meeting on the 15th July to discuss the draft proposals and how any consultation will be taken forward. When the final changes to the services has been agreed a Service Specification will be developed and the services put to tender. It is envisaged that the new services will be in operation by April 2010.

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