

Your LINK for improving health and social care

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Dentistry in Kent

Introduction

The parlous state of NHS general dentistry has been one of the most frequently raised issues by Local Involvement Network (LINK) Participants when they first register with the LINK. The issue was the subject of debate at the LINK's Quarterly Event in April earlier this year at which a presentation was given by NHS West Kent. This report is based on the debate at that time and the assurances that were given by the NHS in West Kent and, subsequently, NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust.

The concerns

The principal concern related to the difficulty patients were having in finding an NHS dentist in certain areas. The areas identified by LINK Participants included:

- Ashford
- Crowborough
- Dartford
- Folkestone
- Maidstone
- Sevenoaks
- Thanet
- Tonbridge
- Tunbridge Wells

Particular concern had been expressed about the Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells areas where earlier this year just one practice – the High Brooms Dental Clinic – was taking on new patients. However, when contacted that practice was putting patients on a waiting list for an appointment and it could take anything up to six months.

Other issues included:

- NHS Dentists not taking on children
- The disappearance of routine six monthly check ups
- High price of dental care deterring people from going to the dentist
- Unable to obtain lists of NHS Dentists

- Poor dental care can make people seriously ill, e.g. those with cardiac problems and pregnant women

The assurances

NHS West Kent has given the LINK the following assurance of actions they are taking to address the shortfall of NHS dentists in their area.

Phase 1 - £1.7m to recruit the equivalent of 6 new dentists and more orthodontic activity in:

- Aylesford
- Dartford
- Gravesend
- Longfield
- Maidstone
- Sevenoaks
- Tonbridge
- Tunbridge Wells

The measures were set to be in place by September 2009 if the new activity could be accommodated by existing dentists in the area or January 2010 if new dentists were to be employed.

Phase 2 - £900,000 to recruit the equivalent of approximately a further six new dentists in:

- Maidstone
- Swanley
- Tunbridge Wells

As previously, these extra resources would be deployed by September 2009 if dentists in the area could take up the new activity or January 2010 if new dentists were to be deployed.

LINK enquiries of NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust established that they too were investing in new dental activity amounting to an investment of £4.5 million that will see new dental surgeries operational in:

- Broadstairs,
- Chestfield,
- Cliftonville,
- Deal,
- Dover,
- Faversham,
- Hawkinge.
- Isle of Sheppey
- Whitstable,

In conclusion

The Committee's review comes at an opportune time to hold NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent and NHS West Kent Primary Care Trusts to account for their promised improvement in access to NHS dentistry in the above areas.

20/12/09