

1 May 2014

Background: Kent Community Health NHS Trust (KCHT) informed Kent County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny committee in March 2014 that it intended to make some changes to its community dental service and outlined its plans to gain feedback from patients and staff. There were two proposals, this paper explains the proposals and the way forward.

Proposal 1: To move the specialist gum disease service from Deal to the Trust's dental clinic at Dover Health Centre. The advantages of this move were improved access to people with disabilities and staff and patients benefitting from a wider dental team which would not have been possible if the service remained at Deal.

- The Deal clinic is on the first floor and there is no lift. This means patients with mobility difficulties can't use the service.
- The clinic is only open one day a week – in Dover it is a five days a week service.
- There is better parking and public transport links in Dover.

More than 90 per cent of patients who attend this specialist clinic are not local to Deal but travel from all over east Kent for their appointment at the Deal clinic. Only nine per cent of the patients seen at Deal live locally.

People living in Ashford, Shepway and Canterbury will have a shorter journey and there are more public transport links and better car parking at Dover.

Proposal 2: To move the community dental services provided at Folkestone to clinics at Ashford, Dover and New Romney which have more modern and spacious facilities including a waiting area and large disabled access lift. The service is provided for patients who need special care. 74 per cent of patients who are initially assessed at this clinic are referred on to another clinic site because they require treatment under sedation or general anaesthetic.

- This change will reduce the number being referred on to another dentist or clinic site and they will need fewer appointments.
- A significant proportion of patients will be able to receive their care and treatment at a clinic closer to their home.
- Two of the alternative clinics are on the ground floor and have good parking and transport links, the third clinic is located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and has a lift
- Patients will have a choice of clinic depending on where they live and what treatment they need, as well as any additional needs.
- Staff and patients will benefit from a wider dental team

Of the patients that attend the clinic, 50 per cent of patients are not local to Folkestone, while 40 per cent of all patients travel from Ashford to the clinic for their treatment.

Feedback from patients:

Letters were written to over 300 patients describing the proposed changes and providing the contact details of the Trust Customer Care Team for future information or feedback on the changes. The team received 15 calls from patients, these were enquiries about future appointments and timescales.

A local resident spoke to the local media in Folkestone and two comments were received via Facebook against the changes.

A letter was also received from a local residential home as the service would be further away from that home.

Feedback from staff:

The views of staff were sought at the same time as patients. A small number of staff suggested closing the Deal and New Romney clinics and using the equipment to update Folkestone.

Outcome: Having considered the feedback it was decided that the advantages of both proposals on patient care and staff development outweighed the small minority of people who would have to travel further.

As a result of patient and staff feedback, the service has obtained a list of all the voluntary patient transport schemes available and will include these details in with letters to patients, as well as information on how they may be able to claim help with their travel costs if they meet eligibility criteria. If a patient is housebound, the service already provides a domiciliary service at the patient's home.

Communications plan: The dental service will be contacting all its patients to advise them of where their future appointments will be held. The service will select the clinic that is closest to where they live, but will also give them the choice as to whether or not they would prefer to travel a little further to retain their current dentist, although for some patients they will continue to see the same dentist.

The changes will take place during the next three months.

Dr Mark Johnstone  
Clinical Director of Dental Services  
Kent Community Health NHS Trust.  
T: 01622 211943