

Hywel Dda Community Health Council

Have you got a Dentist?

April 2021



Accessible formats

This report is also available in Welsh.

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us.

You can download it from our website or ask for a copy by contacting our office.

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About the Community Health Councils (CHCs)

CHCs are independent bodies that reflect the views and represent the interests of people living in Wales in their National Health Service (NHS). CHCs encourage and support people to have a voice in the design, planning and delivery of NHS services.

CHCs are often thought of as the independent watchdog of the NHS within Wales. There are 7 CHCs in Wales. Each one represents the “patient and public” voice in a different part of Wales. Each CHC:



Carries out regular visits to health services to hear from people using the service (and the people providing care) to influence the changes that can make a big difference



Reaches out to people within local communities to provide information, and gather views and experiences of NHS services. CHCs use this information to check how services are performing and to ensure the NHS takes action to make things better where needed



Gets involved with health service managers when they are thinking about making changes to the way services are delivered so that people and communities have their say from the start



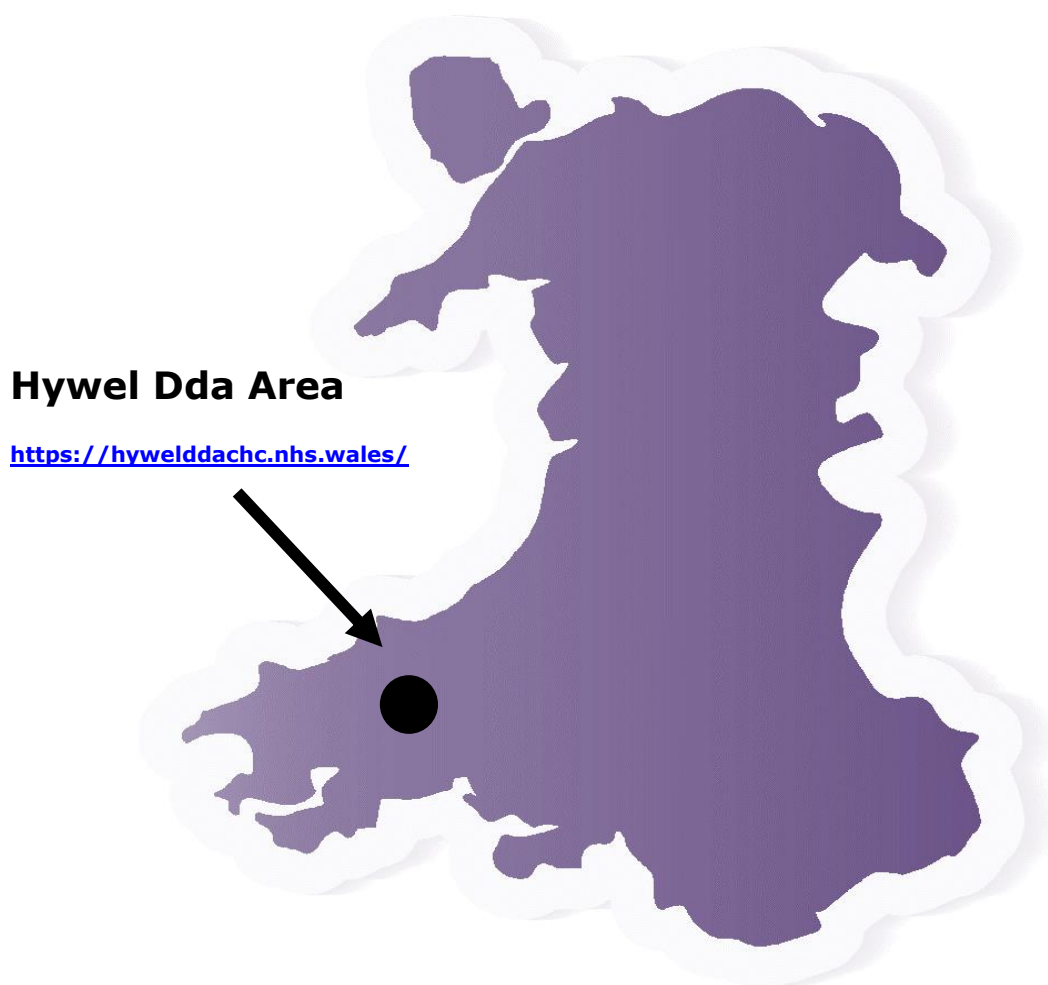
Provides a complaints advocacy service that is free, independent and confidential to help people to raise their concerns about NHS care and treatment.

CHCs hear from the public in many different ways. Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs regularly visited different NHS services to hear from people while they were receiving care and treatment. CHCs also heard from people at local community events, and through community representatives and groups as well as at CHC meetings and in our offices.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, these ways of listening to people have not always been available, so CHCs have focused on hearing from people in different ways. Whilst we cannot meet people on a face to face basis because of the restrictions in place, we have found that many people have learned new ways of doing things differently using technology. This includes surveys, apps, videoconferencing and social media which we have used to hear from people directly about their views and experiences of NHS care.

We also know that this doesn't mean everyone has been able to do this and so we know that there may be people finding it harder to be heard under these very unusual pandemic times.

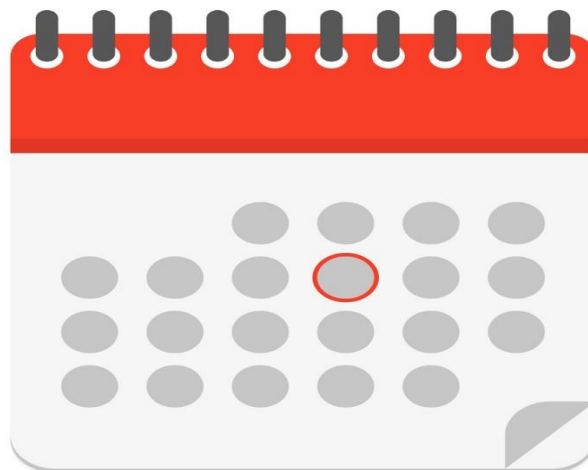
Hywel Dda CHC represents the interests of people living within the three counties of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.



Background

In March 2020, life as we know it in Wales changed significantly, because of the coronavirus pandemic. Along with this, people's access to health care also changed.

During the pandemic we have heard from people about the worries they had about their dental care. Like many services, dental practices had to think about the safety of their staff and patients. This meant that people could no longer go to their dentist for routine appointments and although there was emergency care available, this was not always what people needed. Instead, people went without check-ups or basic dental procedures such as fillings, or denture repairs for many months. Other people who wanted to register with a dentist, found that they were unable to do so.



Residents in the three counties of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire contacted us in various ways to tell us about the difficulty they'd had in getting NHS dental treatment. They were also worried about when things would get back to normal in dentistry so that routine appointments could start again.



The CHC wanted to find out more about this. We know that dental health has a big impact on other aspects of a person's wellbeing; physical and mental health can be impacted by dental problems. So, during the early months of the pandemic, we asked Hywel Dda University Health Board to tell us about how routine dentistry, emergency dentistry as well as how specialist dental care and orthodontics were being delivered.



We understood that because of the pandemic, routine dental care could not continue as before but we wanted to understand more about what the situation was across the three counties.

The CHC undertook a 'mystery shopper' exercise across the three counties of Hywel Dda in order to see what dental services were like. This report details our findings.

What we did

Having heard repeatedly from people who were worried about their dental care, we decided that we wanted to find out more. In particular, we were concerned about people who couldn't seem to access any dental care because they were not registered with a dentist.

We obtained the contact details for each NHS Dental Practice in Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire & Pembrokeshire, using information from the Hywel Dda University Health Board's website. There were 47 practices listed there when we undertook this work in March 2021.

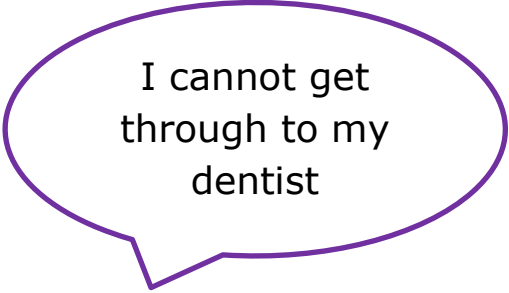
Our members then tried to telephone each dental practice to see how easy it was for someone to be seen. They followed a script asking:

- Is the practice accepting registration of new NHS Dental patients?
- If the practice is accepting new NHS patients, how long would a new patient have to wait for an appointment?
- If the practice is not accepting new NHS patients, would the patient be able to be seen privately?
- If the practice was able to see the patient privately, how long would a new private patient have to wait for an appointment?


Whilst CHCs do not have a role in monitoring the work of private practices, we wanted to see if there was a difference in waiting times for people if they opted for private treatment. People had told us that NHS dentistry appeared to have stopped completely and we wanted to see if the same situation was true for private dentistry.

What we heard


The CHC had received feedback from registered NHS patients, of their recent experiences of accessing NHS Dental services in Hywel Dda Health Board.



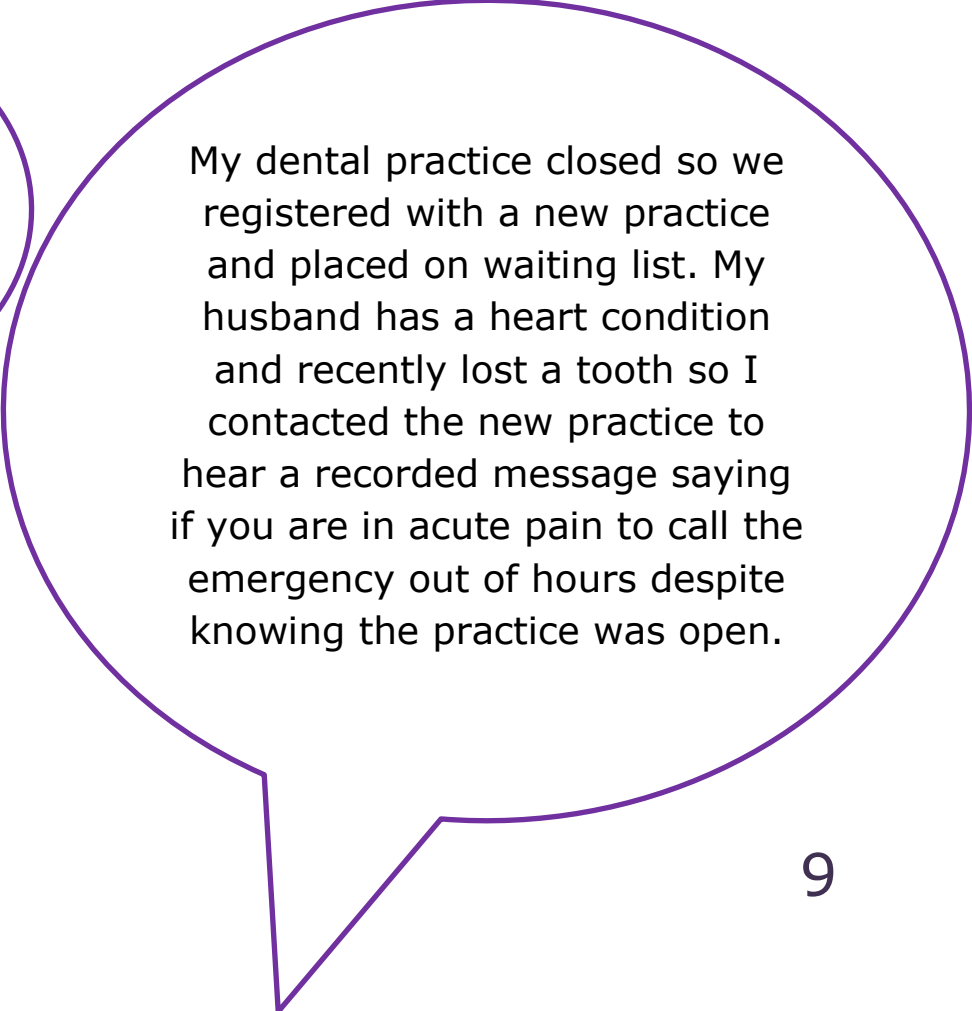
I cannot get through to my dentist



I have moved into the area and cannot register anywhere with a NHS dentist



I phoned for an NHS dentist but advised I could only go privately



My dental practice closed so we registered with a new practice and placed on waiting list. My husband has a heart condition and recently lost a tooth so I contacted the new practice to hear a recorded message saying if you are in acute pain to call the emergency out of hours despite knowing the practice was open.

Learning from what we heard

- The CHC was able to contact 45 out of a total of 47 Dental Practices during office times, meaning that the practices were staffed in normal working hours
- Our survey showed that it is not currently possible to register with an NHS dentist and be seen promptly within the Hywel Dda area.
- Some practices told us they had long waiting lists for NHS care - up to 3 years long.
- Out of the 45 practices we spoke to 27 were only accepting new private patients.
- To register at a private practice often involved a cost of £21 - £150 and the need to have an initial appointment.
- Most private practices offered an appointment date in several weeks' time.
- 2 practices would only accept new private patients depending on an x-ray and condition of the patient's teeth.
- 3 practices confirmed that new private patients could be seen straight away.
- 6 practices suggested calling back in the summer to see if their capacity had improved.

All the receptionists we spoke to by telephone were helpful and suggested contacting 111 for any emergency treatment.

Conclusion

Our 'mystery shopper' exercise disappointingly shows that there is no opportunity for members of the public to register as new NHS Dental patients within Hywel Dda University Health Board currently.

This lack of NHS dentistry means that people often have to seek private dental services instead.

The Health Board has details on its website about dentistry although this may not always be easy to find. A search on the word 'dentist' only provided four results, none of which were details of NHS dentists. A search using the word 'dental' was more helpful as it brought up more relevant information.

There is not a consistent approach across all areas of Hywel Dda in terms of registering with a new dentist. For some areas, the Health Board itself holds a list but in other parts of the three counties patients have to contact the practices directly.

What next...?

We want our findings to be seen and we want them to act as a starting point for making improvements for people. Our report will be shared with Hywel Dda University Health Board so that they can understand the challenges that this situation has on members of the public.

We know that there have been difficulties for some time in getting NHS dentists within our three counties and we want to understand what the Health Board can do to improve this situation for the public.

We will continue to monitor the situation in our contacts with the Health Board and raise this throughout the year to ensure that action is being taken to help make it easier for people to register with a dentist, wherever they live in the three counties.

Thanks

We thank everyone who has taken the time to share their views and experiences with us about their health and care services during the pandemic. Your views and stories have been invaluable in helping us explain to NHS organisations and Welsh Government, what it has felt like for people during the pandemic, when they have a health issue.

Please continue to share your stories and experiences with us via this link - <https://t.co/tScnl8uxs7?amp=1>



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Hywel Dda
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Tracey Masters
Business Manager
Hywel Dda Community Health Council

By email: tracey.masters@waleschc.org.uk

Dear Tracey

Thank you for your email of 19 May 2021, attaching the “Have You Got a Dentist” report and giving the Health Board the opportunity to provide comments. We are grateful to the Community Health Council for sharing this report, which provides an informative picture of the current situation across the Health Board area.

The Health Board closely monitors access to NHS Dental Services, and we are aware that access has been particularly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic. Current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) around Infection Control and Air Flow Changes, along with a backlog of patients created by the pandemic, have impacted on the number of patients that can be seen each day at Dental Practices.

Currently, dentistry in Wales is still in the Amber phase. The guidance issued by the Chief Dental Officer (CDO) for Wales is that Dental Practices must prioritise urgent care and complete any open courses of treatment, before they can recommence routine dental care or see new, routine patients.

The Welsh Government has put systems in place until October 2021, which places an expectation on Dental Practices to accept several new patients each week. The new patient numbers will vary by Dental Practice because these are based on the current value of the NHS contract. The criteria for accepting patients into the new patient slots is that priority will be given to those patients who have a higher clinical need.

The Health Board has seen a 70% increase in patients requiring urgent care appointments since the beginning of the pandemic. In response to this high level of demand, Dental Practices across all areas of the Health Board are providing additional urgent care appointment slots via the Urgent Access Scheme. Therefore, whilst the need for urgent care appointments remains at a high level, it is difficult to plan to increase access for routine care.

Although the Health Board is continually looking at all opportunities to commission new services and to provide better access for patients, the recruitment of dentists is a key challenge. Recently, we have been successful in commissioning a new NHS Dental Practice in South Ceredigion. Once fully established, the Practice is expected to have 4,000 affiliated patients. Additionally, as the pandemic subsides, there is an expectation that an expansion of Contract Reform Practices will result in new NHS patients being accepted.

It is important to recognise that since 1 April 2006, patients are no longer registered with a dentist, but are only affiliated to a Practice. Dental Practices can choose to maintain a list of regular patients to whom they provide ongoing treatment or care. Care is delivered to patients as “courses of treatment”, being discrete units of care, with defined clinical objectives. There is no continuing NHS relationship with patients between courses of treatment, which can result in patients being advised that they need to seek care elsewhere once a course of treatment has concluded.

The Health Board cannot comment on any aspect of private dentistry, as this is outside its remit. Any comments or concerns which the CHC may wish to raise regarding private dental services can be directed to Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, whose contact details are: Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, Welsh Government, Rhydycar Business Park, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ or by email: hiw@gov.wales

It is accepted that it is not easy to navigate to the correct pages on the Health Board’s website to find information about NHS Dentists. This issue was identified just prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Dental Services Team was looking to work with colleagues in the Communications Team to improve this. Unfortunately, this has been delayed as a result of the extra workload created by the pandemic but it will be reviewed and actioned as soon as possible.

Your observations on the confusion caused by the inconsistent approach to waiting lists are noted. The Dental Services Team has discussed this recently and will be presenting a paper to the Dental Quality and Safety Group, to discuss how to disperse the Health Board held waiting list back to the Practices. This will ensure that each Dental Practice holds its own waiting list and can offer new patients a course of treatment in accordance with their clinical needs.

In conclusion, we have noted the issues you have raised in the report and will share the findings with all relevant staff within the Health Board and our colleagues in Dental Practices. We are aware of the challenges to patients in accessing services and the biggest challenge for the Health Board is the recruitment and retention of Dentists. Also, we are now seeing a trend in a shortage of dental nurses, who during the pandemic have either moved to new posts or left the service. The Health Board is nevertheless continually working to commission and invest in new services, wherever possible.

I trust this information is of assistance, but should you require any further detail, then please do not hesitate to contact me once more.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



Steve Moore
Chief Executive

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Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive
Mr Steve Moore

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Hywel Dda yw enw gweithredol Bwrdd Iechyd Lleol Prifysgol Hywel Dda
Hywel Dda University Health Board is the operational name of Hywel Dda University Local Health Board

Mae Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Hywel Dda yn amgylchedd di-fwg Hywel Dda University Health Board operates a smoke free environment

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