



Community insights on dentistry in Tower Hamlets

Dec 2020

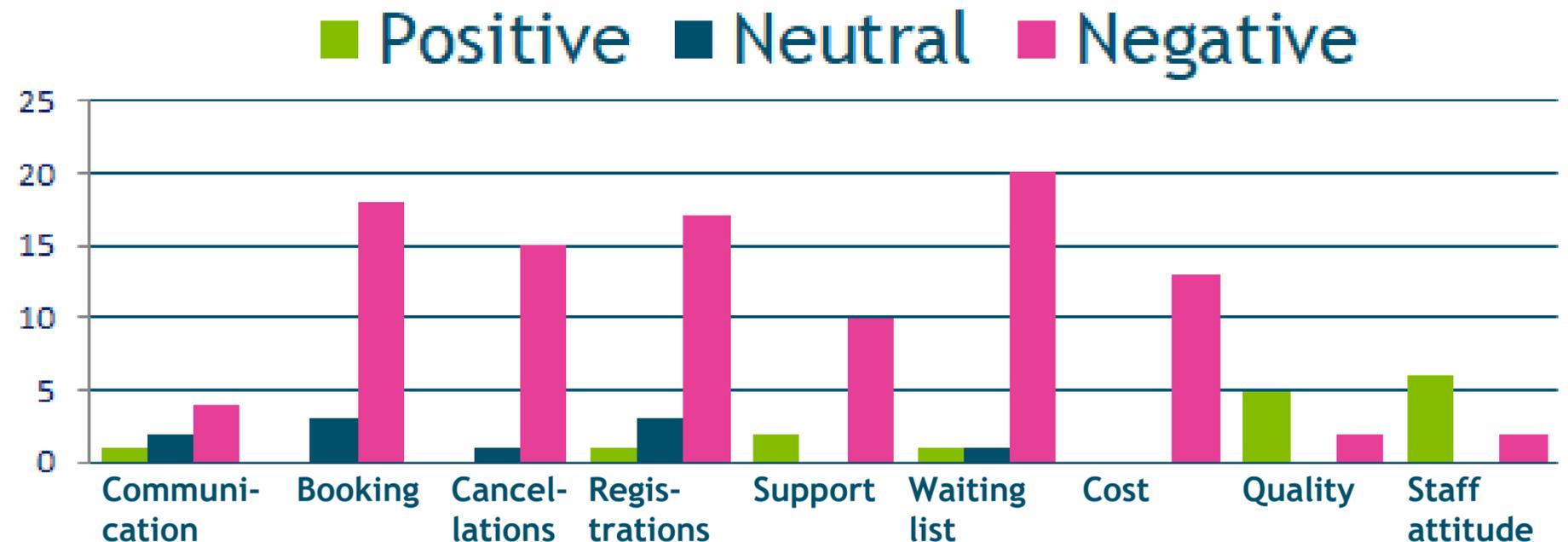
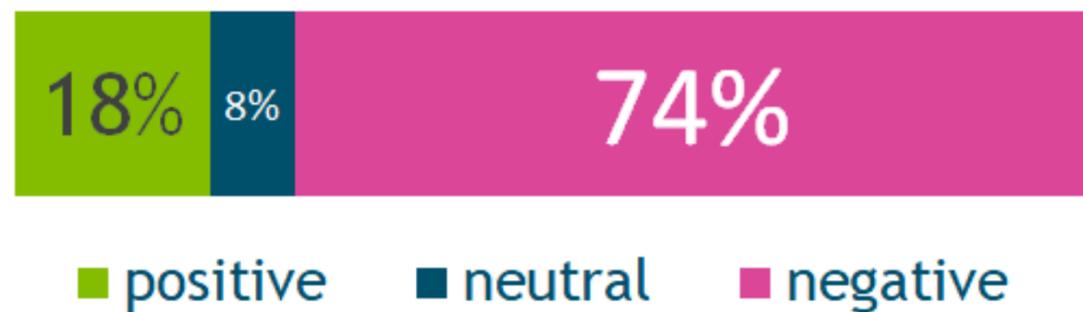
healthwatch
Tower Hamlets



Between March and December 2020, we received 62 comments about primary care dentists and four comments about hospital dentistry.

Opinion of primary care dentistry was **74% negative**, reflecting the pressure on dentistry services in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite serious issues with access, opinion of the quality of service and staff attitude leaned positive.





The challenges faced by dental practices in Tower Hamlets in the Covid-19 pandemic are similar to those experienced nationally.



Patients with non-urgent needs struggle to be seen, and there were also some reports of patients struggling to get urgent appointments for acute dental issues.



Those in need of routine procedures worried that their issues may become acute if left untreated for too long.



Patients reported getting antibiotics or painkillers for their tooth infections, without follow-up dental treatment.



Some patients are not sure whether they can access dental services at all; or feel reluctant to access them because of Covid-19 related worries.



Many dentists stopped accepting new NHS patients. This means that unless they pay privately (which many cannot afford), many patients can only access emergency dental treatment via NHS 111 or the Barts Dental Clinic, with no follow-up.



Patients with non-urgent needs struggle to be seen.

My teeth are a mess due to ill health. I've got one broken down to the root which needs removing under general anaesthetic as well as my wisdom teeth because there's not enough room for them to come in, but obviously that's on the back burner at the moment.

I've experienced delays in getting my routine dental check-ups, but this hasn't been an issue.

A serious filling advised by RLH Dental Clinic has been postponed indefinitely - not causing pain yet, but...

For the first months of lockdown, dental treatment was only available for emergencies. As routine appointments became available again, a large backlog meant that many still could not be seen. In the meantime, patients are concerned about their dental issues worsening without treatment.



There are also reports of patients who could not even access urgent care.

Called 111 about my dental pain; tooth remains untreated to this day.

My daughter has been having a toothache on and off, but we couldn't get a dental appointment.



Those in need of routine procedures worried that their issues may become acute if left untreated for too long.

I don't know when I can see my dentist again. It may make my dental health bad.

I called my dentist twice and the line was busy both times. I finally got an appointment in six weeks, which is ages away but that was the earliest they had. Then my appointment was cancelled because of corona and it honestly made me really frustrated and anxious. I like going to the dentist regularly and making sure everything is okay with my teeth.

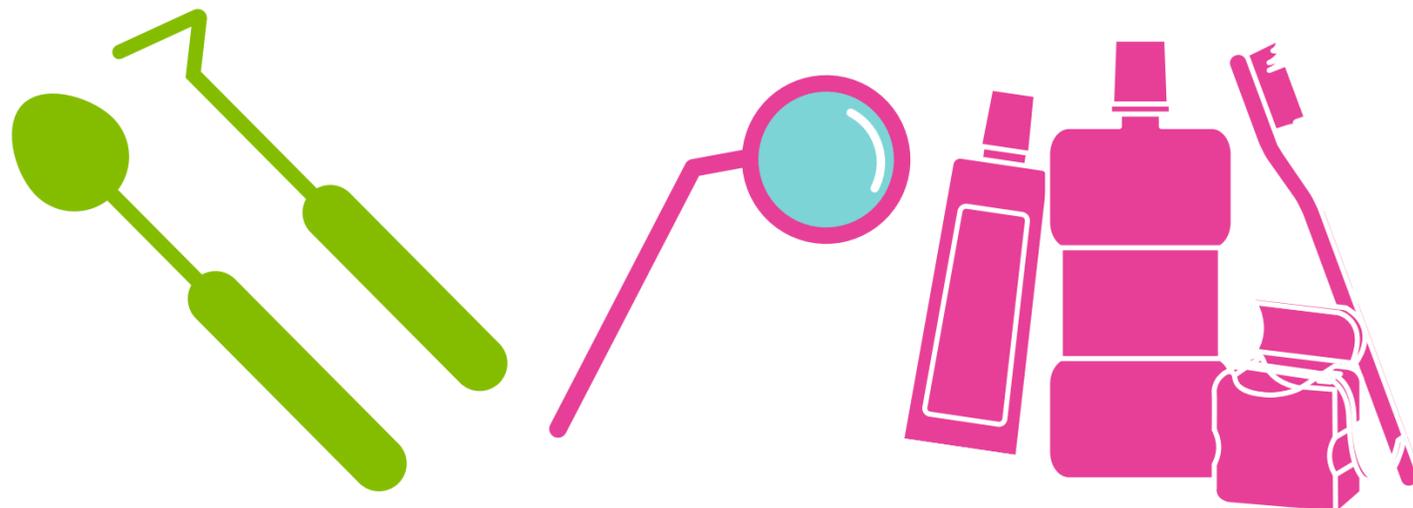


Patients reported getting antibiotics or painkillers for their tooth infections, without follow-up dental treatment.

My husband has a bad toothache. His dentist gave him antibiotics in hope this will fix his problem, but we can't see him.

At this moment I had dental problems, but face to face appointments are cancelled, that's why I suffered a lot at home. I just take pain killers, and I'm also afraid to go to the hospital and dentists, because Corona virus is spreadable.

I have been struggling with a bad infection in my wisdom tooth in the left side down and was in the emergency dentist several times and was eating antibiotics for a month, but I can't get treatment because I'm not registered with a dentist.



Some patients are not sure whether they can access dental services at all.

Poor communication and general awareness of how services are impacted by lockdown leaves people hesitant about even trying to access the dental services they need.

For the last 3 days, the right side of my face has been throbbing like something else. It feels like I've had a punch in the jaw. What's the crack with the dentists as it is? Is it even worth giving them a call if I don't think it's an infection & I'm waiting for hospital treatment for my teeth?

I read something in the news about how all non-urgent dental procedures are cancelled. I presume this means that urgent dental care is still available, though I am afraid I don't know more than that.



Concern about Covid-19 may also make some patients more reluctant to seek dental care.

Me and my wife need emergency dental treatment, but we can't get any appointments, and we are very scared to go to the emergency in hospital because of all of the coronavirus patients there and how it could spread.



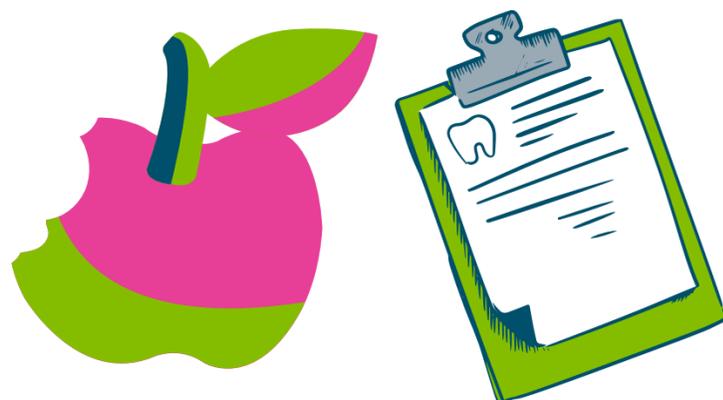
Many dentists stopped accepting new NHS patients.

I can't eat anything other than yoghurt and similar things, as I have a broken tooth in the bottom right side and a wisdom tooth infection. I really need a NHS dentist but I haven't been able to find one that will except new patents. I moved to London just before the first lockdown.

I'm in bad pain due to cavities. I'm struggling to find a dentist who takes new NHS patients. I have been looking for weeks now and the pain is getting worse and worse.

I've called around all dental practices locally and none of them were taking new NHS patients.

I have walked to the practice with pain in my tooth and I have been told by this practice that the does not accept NHS patients and only will be treated if I am a privatly paying patient.



If no practices in the local area are accepting NHS patients, those who are not registered yet can access the Barts Emergency Clinic or call 111 and receive an emergency appointment in various dental practices. However, this means that those who were not already the patients of a local dentist at the start of the pandemic can only access dental care in an emergency, not ongoing or preventative treatment. In these cases, treatment may be focused only on superficially treating the acute issue and stopping the pain, without addressing the root cause of the problem.



Lack of NHS appointments, especially for new patients, is creating inequalities between those who can afford to pay privately and those who cannot.

I struggled to find a dentist in London that is currently taking NHS patients due to the pandemic. Most practices offered me private care which I am unfortunately unable to afford.



Further questions



What kind of support would dental practices need in order to deal with the disruption to their services caused by Covid-19 and return to normal?



What obstacles do dental practices face that prevent them from accepting more NHS patients? What would allow them to start accepting new NHS patients sooner?



Should dental practice staff and patients due to undergo dental work be prioritised for Covid-19 vaccinations? Would this impact on the capacity dental surgeries currently have?



How can patients be kept informed about availability of appointments, safety measures and availability of PPE in dental practices?