

KD/kk/ac/1093-08

4 June 2008

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Dear Cllr Blakely

### Blog – Like Pulling Teeth!

Your article 'Like Pulling Teeth!' referred to a 70% access rate for dental services in Wirral as a 'total disgrace'. I must register a strong objection to this statement. It may be helpful to give you some information regarding access to dental care and the attendance pattern of patients.

### Patients Access Statistics

The NHS Information Centre Dental Statistics for England clearly show that access to dental care in the Wirral is the best in the North West of England and well above the national and North West average. Our dentists work hard to provide accessible services to patients. This is to be commended.

Numbers of patients seen in the previous 24 months as a percentage of the population (September 2007) are as follows:

	% of population
England	54.4
North West SHA	59.1
Wirral	68.5

These statistics demonstrate very clearly that financial investment in dentistry on Wirral has resulted in relatively high levels of patient access and care. There is no concept of registration within the new contract. Dentists now open their notional practice lists to new patient acceptance and prioritise their working practice according to individual patient needs. This in essence means that patients who do not require treatment and who have stable oral health can leave their recall interval between visits from previously 6 months to 2 years without detriment to their oral health. The effectiveness of this approach is evidence based. This allows dentists to see a different cohort of patients year on year and not recurrently recall patients with no treatment requirement. In this way the population who seek care and need it will have access to a dentist. Our Wirral practices have taken on considerable numbers of new patients onto their lists since the commencement of the new contract. There is no evidence that attendance at a dentist has fallen since the new contract - there has been a demonstrated year on year increase for Wirral residents.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Chairman: Mrs Frances Street  
Chief Executive: Ms Kathy Doran OBE

### **PCT facilitates patient access**

The PCT has an excellent record of being able to allocate all residents who are seeking dental care to a dentist. The PCT has a dedicated dental helpline. All residents contacting this helpline for urgent care are allocated to a dentist within 24 hours. Patients seeking a dentist for routine care are offered a choice of dentists accepting patients. Whilst some dentists may close their lists periodically whilst coping with demand, at any one time at least 50% of Wirral practices can accept a new patient onto their practice list. This again is to be commended.

### **Attendance Patterns of Residents**

Wirral has 52 General Dental Practices spread across the area. Where there are high levels of general socio economic deprivation, health in general is poor and equally oral health is poor – there is a direct correlation. However, whilst we have dental practices in these areas of high deprivation, attendance amongst certain population groups is still poor and care is sought only when there are immediate symptoms, notably toothache. Many of our local practices in such areas encourage regular patient attendance but find very high failure rates without any notice of cancellations. Across the country it is well evidenced that attendance at a dentist is worst and only when having symptoms, in certain groups of the population, in particular, in the male population who are in the occupational classes of manual and unemployed workers (34%) compared with non manual employed workers at (25%). The pattern of attendance at a dentist is therefore not simply a function of availability of services but is much more complex. Regular and unprompted attendance is difficult to achieve for some groups of the population and it is these irregular attenders who make up the 30% that show up in the DH statistics as not having attended a dentist in the last two years. The PCT are looking at how best to provide alternative services which encourage dental care for these groups, who perhaps find it inconvenient, difficult or intimidating to attend a dentist. This is not just a Wirral dental problem it is common across the country and especially in the most deprived areas. It also occurs in many areas of health care delivery especially where we would like to see greater uptake of preventive attendance in these high risk groups.

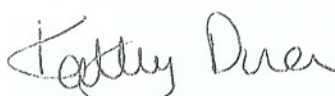
### **Wirral PCT Initiatives**

The PCT is not complacent regarding access. Recently, a Dental Board has been set up to promote clinical engagement across practices and includes patient and public representation to improve communication between the public, the PCT and the profession. New access initiatives are being explored and the PCT are looking at ways in which to enhance the new contract for our dentists, to specifically promote and reward increased access and acceptance of new patients with high treatment needs from the more deprived areas of Wirral. The PCT is currently developing a new initiative using a dental mobile unit to support communities in these areas and in particular to increase access for children in the school setting.

Ensuring access to dental services is and will remain a priority for Wirral PCT.

I hope this clarification is helpful.

Yours sincerely



**Kathy Doran**  
Chief Executive