



## Disabled Access to Dental Services in South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw

A Summary Report from Healthwatch Sheffield

March 2017

## Research summary

**The objective of this research was to explore access to dental services in South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw from the perspective of service users with a disability, and dental healthcare professionals**

Two related surveys were drawn up and distributed to dental services in South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw and to service users with disabilities. We received 63 responses to the Disabled Access to Dental Services Survey for patients, and 77 responses to our Disabled Access to Dental Services Survey for professionals.

Many of those with disabilities acknowledged the positive aspects of the communication, support and care they had received during dental treatment.

The findings, however, demonstrated that the accessibility of buildings is an issue for many people, with inappropriate or lack of adaptations for patients with disabilities. There were also a number of other concerns highlighted such as waiting times and the cost of services.

Dental services users said they want more accessible dental surgeries, improved communication with their dental healthcare professionals, and to have an increased understanding of their disability reflected in their treatment and care.

Likewise, dental healthcare professionals said that buildings should be more accessible and funding should be available to support the provision of aids and adaptations. Healthcare professionals also said that increasing their knowledge of disability was important both for care and practice and that more training opportunities would be helpful.

## Key findings

- Half of the respondents were happy with the service they were currently receiving at their dentist.
- Almost a fifth (22%) of respondents had not visited the dentist for more than two years. Reasons for this include issues with getting there and accessibility of the building, anxieties over attending and procedures, cost of treatment and a lack of understanding of the importance of good dental health.
- 85% of dental healthcare professionals reported that they could provide suitable treatment for wheelchair users if required. However, 41% of them

stated that they would like further equipment. Only 6% felt they had all the equipment that they needed to treat all patients.

- 25% of dental practices that we surveyed offer a home visiting service.
- 57% of service users reported that they had had a difficult and/or negative experience at the dentist.
- 18% of service users attended their current dentist because it was the only one available or they felt that they had no choice. Some service users acknowledged that their dental practice had taken positive steps to meet their needs such as using a downstairs treatment room.
- A number of service users mentioned that there were barriers in communication between them and the dental professionals. These include feeling unable to ask questions, checking understanding and speaking to the patient and carer appropriately.

## Recommendations

1. Dental practices should aim for their premises to be fully accessible wherever possible. All dental practices should aim to have a large automatic entrance door, ramps, accessible toilet facilities, hearing loops and an accessible treatment room (see page14).
2. We recognise that making all premises fully accessible can be difficult and/or expensive and will take time. NHS Choices has information about disabled access at dental practices - where this has been provided. Dental practices should make sure that NHS Choices and any other sources of information include up to date information about accessibility issues and any support available (see page14).
3. There are a number of other non-physical adjustments that practices should consider making. These include giving people with disabilities longer appointments or having appointments at a time when there are fewer people around, taking extra time to explain things to patients and providing large print information. See useful information published by Citizens' Advice here: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/healthcare/discrimination-in-health-and-care-services/health-and-care-services-common-situations/disability-discrimination-when-accessing-and-using-health-services> (see page 15).
4. We recommend that dental practices follow up disabled people who do not attend regularly (and in particular people who have not attended for more than

two years) to identify any physical or emotional barriers, and offer support where possible (see page 10).

5. We recommend that professionals should increase their awareness and understanding of communication barriers during treatment (including for people with a hearing impairment) and try to accommodate these needs and communicate appropriately (see page 15).
6. NHS England/ South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Dental Local Professional Network to provide information to dental healthcare professionals about access to funding for improvements, or information about accessible aids and equipment (see page 14).
7. Service users and healthcare professionals acknowledged that they had the best intentions in providing quality treatment and care, but a lack of knowledge was often a barrier. We therefore recommend that dental healthcare staff are trained in disability awareness (including deaf awareness). This could be commissioned/organised locally or sub-regionally by the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Local Professional Network (see page 16).

Please contact Healthwatch Sheffield or visit the website for a copy of the full report and to see the response to the report from the South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw Dental Local Professional Network.

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