

New mobile dental service for under-served communities in Hampshire and Isle of Wight



Dentist Mary Green treating a patient on the mobile dental unit

NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight has partnered with Dentaid the Dental Charity to provide a new mobile dental service for people experiencing health inequalities who struggle to get dental care.

The innovative project is a partnership to alleviate pressure on existing dental services and increase access to care for those facing difficult circumstances.

Patients including families experiencing poverty, people at risk of homelessness,

children, and new and expectant mothers in areas at highest risk of poor dental health will be able to make appointments to see the dentist on a mobile dental unit.

Emergency appointments will also be available for eligible patients who are suffering acute pain and have no other access to dental care.

Dentaid's mobile dental units will be parking outside community centres, public buildings and sports facilities

across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Eligible patients will be invited to make appointments to see the dentist onboard who will provide check-ups and oral cancer screening, oral health advice and emergency care including extractions and fillings. All treatment will be free of charge.

The service is for Hampshire and Isle of Wight residents facing health inequalities who have no other access to dental services. Agencies including support services, community groups, GP practices, foodbanks, charity partners and 111 will be signposting eligible patients to make an appointment.

The partnership will provide clinics across Hampshire and Isle of Wight over 18 months. The first clinics will take place in Southampton, Havant, Cosham and Portsmouth followed by the Isle of Wight in March and other areas of Hampshire later in the year. The service is designed to help communities at the highest risk of social exclusion to access dental screening, advice and urgent care.

CEO of Dentaid the Dental Charity, Andy Evans said: 'This pioneering partnership with NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight will enable us to significantly upscale our work, reaching new communities and giving thousands more Hampshire and Isle of Wight residents who face health inequalities the opportunity to access care. By taking charity dental units into communities where our patients can use other support services, we are helping to break down some of the barriers people face when it comes to seeing a dentist.'

New organisation will focus on reducing barriers for overseas dentists

The International Dental Organisation UK, IDO UK, an organisation made up of dental practitioners, will formally launch in London this March. Its core mission is to support the UK dental industry by increasing the quality of dental care quality and improving access for consumers. IDO will also focus on

reducing barriers for overseas dentists to practise in the UK to help bridge the deepening gap in the dental workforce.

Many thousands of qualified overseas dentists want to practise in the UK, some of whom are already in the country working as dental nurses or in unrelated sectors. However, registration processes

are blocking easy recruitment. This is unacceptable at a time of acute staffing shortages within UK dentistry, and long waiting lists for patient appointments across the country.

The overseas registration exam (ORE), which overseas qualified dentists must pass in order to register with the

« General Dental Council and practise in the UK, is characterised by delays and long waiting times, with applicants sometimes waiting up to two years to complete the exam. There are also high costs associated with the process, which can cost individuals almost £4,000.

Reducing barriers for overseas dentists to join the UK dental workforce would significantly reduce pressure on the UK dental industry and improve patient care.

As well as pushing for reforms to UK dental registration systems, IDO UK aims to improve the quality of oral healthcare and advocate for high standards of patient care. Its vision

is to create a vibrant community of dental professionals, both national and domestic, across the country, and drive innovation, collaboration and continuous improvements within the sector.

Commenting on the launch, Chair of the Association of Dental Groups (ADG) and IDO UK Trustee Neil Carmichael said: 'The ADG is delighted to support the work of the IDO.

'We know international recruitment is essential for the future of dentistry in the UK so the IDO's role as a support structure, pathway to registration as a dentist, and beacon for professional development is incredibly valuable in delivering effective workforce planning.'

The launch event was due to take place on 6 March 2024 at the Royal Over-Seas League in London.

In other news, the ADG has continued its campaign to boost Britain's dental workforce by urging the GDC to speed up the approval of qualified dentists through the overseas registration exam (ORE).

At present, there is a bottleneck of 2,000 overseas dentists waiting to take the ORE, which is characterised by lengthy delays.

While the ADG fully supports the NHS long-term workforce plan to increase UK training of dentists, this will only see significant increases in qualified dentists from mid-2030. By that time, many NHS dental practices will be closed.

Mobile clinics bring dental care to people who are homeless

Community dental provider, CDS CIC, has been piloting a treatment programme for people with Severe Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) and/or homelessness. The pilot is a partnership between CDS and the East Midlands Primary Care Team, working on behalf of five integrated care boards in the Midlands.

The CDS Mobile Dental Clinic has been visiting locations in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire that offer established services for people who are homeless. Patients are supported to attend appointments in an environment with which they are familiar, for check-ups and follow-up treatment.

People experiencing SMD and homelessness face many barriers to accessing oral health care and experience higher levels of dental caries and periodontal disease than the general population. Poor oral health is linked to a decreased quality of life among these patients, compounding issues such as poor diet and substance misuse to alleviate pain. Thirty-six percent of people who are homeless have accessed A&E services due to oral health related pain. People who are homeless can often feel ashamed and embarrassed to attend a dental practice full of people, fearing that they will be judged as well as facing difficulty finding and registering with a dentist without a fixed address.



The pilot been specifically designed around the needs of this patient group, with the mobile dental clinic attending places they are already familiar with and trust.

Nicola Milner, Chief Operating Officer for CDS in the Midlands, said: 'We worked closely with people who support this group of patients, and we are becoming known and trusted. It is fantastic that we can provide a positive experience for patients who may not have had good experiences accessing dental care before and to relieve

their pain and embarrassment associated with their teeth.'

So far, the mobile clinic has seen 145 patients at twice weekly sessions which are also opportunities to signpost to other services, such as smoking cessation and drug and alcohol support. The mobile clinic is equipped to provide a full range of dental treatment. Feedback from patients has been overwhelmingly positive:

The pilot began in June and is set to continue for 12 months.