



Ein cyf/Our ref EM/02751/23

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20 November 2023

Dear James,

Thank you for your email of 16 October about access to NHS dentistry in Denbighshire.

There seems to be a narrative circulating that dental practices are terminating their NHS contracts and moving to an exclusive private service only, converting those patients that can afford it onto private dental plans. There are some examples of this happening, but the scale does not equate to the concern being expressed. At the start of April 2022, there were 413 dental contracts in place across Wales; 26 of those contracts have been terminated for a range of reasons such as retirement, practice sale and practices choosing to move to private only provision. Six of these are located in North Wales but only one is in the Denbighshire area. In the majority of cases where contracts have been varied or terminated, Health Boards have already or are in the process of recommissioning replacement services. This shows that there is a genuine appetite for taking on NHS contracts.

Indeed, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board will very soon be concluding a commissioning exercise for replacement services in circumstances where NHS contracts have been reduced or have terminated. The Health Board is anticipating being able to award substantial funding for new contracts in the near future. If the Health Board procures additional activity in existing dental practices that could commence then almost immediately, however, if a new dental practice is being established there will be a longer lead in time.

The Health Board acknowledges that there are other challenges in the Denbighshire area. There are two practices in the Rhyl and Denbigh area which were placed for sale when Bupa reviewed their portfolio earlier this year. However, new practice owners have since been identified and the sales are progressing through the Health Board's governance process. Both practices remain operational while the sale process is concluded.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Health Board is also working with the owner of two of the larger practices in the area who are having recruitment issues and unable to deliver the full extent of their contract. Action plans with these practices have been put in place to monitor activity in accordance with the contracts and the Health Board continues to explore all options.

Anyone seeking access to NHS dental services should contact their Health Board for the latest information. I suggest your constituents contact Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board by email: BCU.dentalcontractingteam@wales.nhs.uk to explain their current circumstances and to ask for an update about access in the local area. The Health Board is advising people to contact a practice of their choice and to join the practice waiting list for access to routine care. They will also be able to provide details of the access sessions and availability of urgent treatment the Health Board provides for those residents not yet placed with a practice.

We are working with Health Boards to ensure that as part of the recovery of services, measures are included to ensure dental practices see new patients. I am committed to increasing new patient access as part of dental reform and since April 2022 almost 246,000 new patients have gained access to an NHS dentist across Wales, including over 47,500 new patients in the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board area. Overall, over 1 million people received NHS dental care through the general dental service last year, with over 1.3 million courses of treatment delivered. If dental treatment is urgent or the patient is in pain, there is provision in place to provide care quickly. We will continue to invest in dental services in a way that continues to increase access for new patients but there may be a delay while appointments for routine care become available in your constituent's local area.

Workforce is a key part of improving access to NHS dental care and we are looking to identify and establish innovative opportunities to upskill and improve career pathways in dentistry to make working in Wales more attractive. Health Education and Improvement Wales continues to concentrate on ensuring that they work with stakeholders to have a focus on both recruitment and retention of the dental workforce in Wales. Most recently they have launched a scheme to incentivise dental trainees in dental practices across rural Wales, rather than more popular urban areas. This will help to increase access to NHS care for local people in rural Wales.

Skill-mix can also play a significant role in the provision of NHS dental care and the reform programme has highlighted the advantages of a well-balanced dental team delivering preventive-based approaches. From April 2023 dental therapists, hygienists and clinical dental technicians can open and close NHS courses of treatment which increases the capacity of our existing workforce.

Yours sincerely,



Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services