Dental Action Plans in Gloucestershire

SUMMARY:
This report provides updates on progress with the Dental Action Plans in all three Primary Care Trusts, which aim to improve local access to NHS dentistry.

CONTEXT:
At its meeting in July 2004 the committee agreed to look at access to NHS Dentistry in more detail. A sub-group was created to undertake some initial fact-finding on the topic in order to decide how the OSC should tackle the issue. The sub-group decided that the OSC should become involved in scrutinising the NHS' Dental Action Plans, but after further investigation concluded that there was little that could be done at that time as the action plans were in their early stages. The committee therefore agreed to receive an update on the Dental Action Plans in June 2005 and that it would decide what further engagement it wanted with the issue at that stage.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN:-
The committee is asked to consider the report and agree what further work the OSC wishes to undertake on this topic.

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Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Dental Action Plans
In Gloucestershire

Purpose:

This paper intends to inform and update the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on progress with Dental Action Plans in all three Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in Gloucestershire, following up on previous reports and meetings of a subcommittee.

Conscious of changes in membership of the Committee, it also gives some background to Dentistry in the county, and the context of change and development driven by government policy.

Context of NHS Dentistry:

NHS Dentistry has historically been provided by “High Street Dentists” who are independent contractors – small self-employed businesses, who work for the NHS on a Contract for Services, based on a fee for every item of service provided to NHS patients. The relationship with the NHS has historically been a low key bureaucratic relationship, with the Secretary of State / NHS centrally deciding the level of fees, payment through the Dental Practice Board (DPB), and a local registration and light touch inspection on a 3 yearly basis. Dentists have had full control over how many NHS patients they treat, who they treat, and the opportunity to undertake work in the Private sector. They are able to choose to reduce or increase their NHS commitment. The NHS has worked on the basis of patients being “Registered” with a dentist, in the same way as patients are registered with a General Practitioner, except that if a patient does not attend for 15 months, the registration with the dentist automatically lapses.

This system has its pro’s and con’s, but worked reasonably well until 1992, when the level of fees payable to dentists for treating patients, was reduced. This resulted in many dentists re-evaluating their commitment to the NHS and de-registering many patients. In Gloucestershire, the level of NHS registration fell over the following 10 years from over 65% to around 35%, with the majority of the remaining patients on the NHS being children and exempt adults. Non-exempt adults have been forced to pay private fees for dentistry, and as a consequence, there is a significant proportion of the population who do not have a dentist, and may not have visited one for many years.

The dental health of the population has none the less improved generally over the last 10 – 20 years, in parallel with improving standards of living and education, and the use of fluoridised toothpaste. There are however significant numbers of patients with poor dental health, including a proportion of the population of children.

Cotswold & Vale PCT. 24/05/05
The “New Dental Contract”

The Government published a white paper on dentistry called “Options For Change” in 2002. This proposed a process to move towards a new style of contract for dentists, the key feature of which was to get away from the Fee per Item of Service system, which was regarded as a treadmill for dentists and focused on treating dental disease, with no encouragement – if anything a disincentive, for preventative care. This new contract has been taken forward through a number of stages, including a number of pilot sites (including one in Dursley) to a position where dentists are able now to sign up to a new style of contract, which all NHS dentists will have to move to on 1st April 2006.

The new contract in essence takes the existing workload and patients that a dentist has, and sets an annual contract price, which is paid in monthly instalments. This enables dentists to move to a more preventative pattern of care without loss of income, but does not however increase the amount dentists are paid per patient, so will not “buy back” the shift to Private dentistry that has occurred.

The Situation in Gloucestershire;

The levels of NHS registrations with a dentist have declined progressively from the high point in 1992 of 65%, to the picture demonstrated below in the graph, showing the relative levels in the three Gloucestershire PCTs over the past 3 years. West Glos PCT at 25.4% is one of the lowest levels in England, and as a result, the Department of Health offered the support of its Dental Action Team. The help came in the form of specific capital grants to help develop dental access in the Forest of Dean - Cinderford in particular, and to establish a new dental practice in Gloucester. This specific help also came with some additional management resources. All three PCTs have subsequently been given some additional capital funding to develop dental access and there is a national fund of additional revenue that can be accessed by PCTs through moving dentists to the early new style contracts. Each PCT has developed its own action plan, and this report gives an update by PCT on both action to date,
and plans for future action. It is expected that the downward trend of NHS dental registrations will reverse over the next year.

In 1998 in response to the declining NHS registrations, and the significant numbers of patients with no dentist, the Gloucestershire Health Authority set up its own salaried dental service to meet the needs of patients with dental pain requiring urgent treatment. This service has expanded since then into a substantial service, treating over 17,000 patients a year. The service does not register patients, so they do not feature on the chart shown above. This service provides the Dental Access Centre in Gloucester at Southgate Moorings, and the smaller Access Centre at the St Paul's Medical Centre in Cheltenham. It also provides sessions in 9 other outreach clinics, using facilities of the Community Dental Service. (The community Dental Service is another specialised salaried dental service provided by Cotswold & Vale PCT, focused on providing dental care for disabled and disadvantaged groups of people, who would not otherwise be able to access dentistry.)

Action Plans: West Glos PCT:

The West Glos PCT action plan was focused on saving the only dental surgery in Cinderford from closure, and expanding capacity in Gloucester.

- The surgery in Cinderford has been purchased by the PCT, and completely refurbished to a high modern standard. A contract has been agreed with Whitecross Dental Care, a dental “Body Corporate” to provide dental services. The surgery reopened in October 2004 with 2 dentists. This has now expanded to three and should reach full capacity of 4 dentists by May 2005. This will provide capacity for the registration of 10,000 NHS patients.
- The PCT has also reached agreement with the same dental body corporate to establish a completely new dental practice in Gloucester. Premises have been secured at Eastgate House, Eastgate Street, for a 4 surgery practice, refurbishment of the premises started in March 2005. The practice will open in June 2005, and will again offer the capacity for a further 10,000 NHS registrations.
- Access funds have been used to secure agreements with existing dentists to take on an additional 6400 NHS registrations by September 2005.
- Plans are currently being developed to expand the Dental Access Centre at Southgate Moorings. Additional space has been acquired, and plans are under way to build an additional 4 dental surgeries. This will not result in new registrations, but will expand the capacity of the access centre to perform routine dental care.

These initiatives, achieved through targeted funding from the NHS Dental Access Support Team, will significantly increase the availability of NHS dental care to the population of West Glos PCT, offering some 26,400 new registrations and further expanded Dental Access Centre capacity. These actions will have a
significant positive impact on increasing the NHS registration rate for the population of the PCT.

The other two PCTs have not benefited from the targeted investment from the NHS Dental Action Team, and thus have not had the opportunity to gain so many additional registrations, however good progress has been made, and is likely to continue.

Cheltenham & Tewkesbury PCT:

The Cheltenham & Tewkesbury PCT has been working on an action plan, which is overseen by a local Dental Services Group. The key objectives of this group are to develop a communications strategy to engage local dentists, use capital grants to increase NHS registrations, and undertake some dental health needs assessment to feed into a Dental Strategy. This has resulted in the following achievements:

- Overseas recruitment with a Cheltenham Town Centre Practice, assisted by the PCT has resulted in two Polish dentists due to commence in June 2005 with an increased capacity of 4000 new NHS registrations.
- Access grants have assisted a new Practice Partnership to re-furbish the Premises and recruit new Dentists, which will provide 2000 new NHS registrations.
- Discussions have been taking place with a Dentist wishing to open a new Practice within Cheltenham. The PCT has agreed terms of both financial and managerial support and is currently seeking guidance from the Town Council regarding appropriate premises and access for services. It is envisaged that this new Practice with 3 Dentists, will provide 6000 NHS registrations.
- Funding has been secured to increase the number of Dental Chairs at St. Paul’s Dental Access Centre, Cheltenham. Expansion to be completed by the end of 2005.

Work continues with the Dental Community to increase Dental access for the local population, whilst 6000 additional registrations have already been secured, it is hoped that the growth will increase if the new Practice is secured. New ways of work, skill-mix and training are all areas being evaluated, which could result in additional availability of NHS dental care.

Cotswold and Vale PCT.

Work in Cotswold & Vale PCT has also focused on the use of capital grants and overseas recruitment to increase the numbers of NHS patients under treatment and registered.

- A completely new dental surgery has opened in Stonehouse. This will offer NHS dental care for 1000 patients, 500 of whom are already registered. It is anticipated that this practice will eventually expand to 2 or 3 dentists from the current single dentist.
• A second completely new dental surgery has opened in Chipping Campden, which will offer NHS care for 500 new patients in the first instance. Again it is hoped that this will expand further.

• A dental practice in Wotton Under Edge has taken on 700 new NHS registrations, and is looking to redevelop the surgery and take on a further 1800 NHS patients.

• Negotiations are under way with two dentists regarding expansion using currently unused dental chairs, filling them with dentists recruited through the DoH overseas recruitment programme. This will add a further 3000 new NHS registrations. The new dentists are expected to be in place by December 2005.

• The PCT is currently in discussion with a dentist to set up another brand new surgery in the Stroud area with 2 dentists. Again this is expected to deliver a further 5000 new NHS registrations.

• The new contract “Field Site” practice in Dursley will also take on an additional 1800 patients in 2005-06

Many of the above plans are still in negotiation and are not yet fully finalised, but together should offer over 12,000 new NHS registrations. These plans will take a year or more to mature to the point of all the new registrations being achieved.

Conclusion:

All three PCTs have put considerable effort into developing dentistry over the past year, and have achieved significant results. There are many plans under way that are not yet completed and will take 1 – 2 years to fully yield all their intended benefits. These results demonstrate the possibilities of local commissioning, especially when backed up by additional resources. These results have been achieved without fundamentally altering the unit costs of NHS dentistry.

Once we have been through these developments and funding is fully delegated to PCTs, it is unlikely that there will be further significant big gains, as growth in funding is likely to be limited. It is also unlikely that the move to the new contract in April 2006 for all dentists will offer much increase in numbers, and it is possible that some dentists will lose their remaining NHS work at that stage to go completely private.

It is likely that at the end of the process about 50,000 more people will be registered with a NHS dentist. These planned developments will bring Gloucestershire closer to the national average of NHS registrations by about 10%, though West Glos PCT in particular will see a higher percentage gain. These measures unfortunately, will not make NHS dentistry universally available in the county, dentists will still have full and closed lists and there will still be patients without a NHS dentist. They do however represent a significant improvement in the existing position.