

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Case Reference: PE30156

June 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your email about NHS dentistry in Darlington.

The Government and Steve Barclay, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, have made clear that improving access to NHS dentistry will be one of her key priorities in the role over the coming months.

Dentistry is an integral part of the clinical services provided by the NHS. I believe it is important that the most vulnerable and those on low incomes continue to receive support and access dental treatment.

Waiting times have been affected by the pandemic and the degree of infection control measures that were required to keep services going during the pandemic. Despite these pressures, dental services in many parts of England have been recovering. NHS England has set out its expectation that dental practices return to delivering treatment at pre-pandemic levels.

I also recognise that many patients face additional challenges in accessing NHS dentists. At the start of 2022, the Government provided £50 million funding across England to support the delivery of 350,000 additional dental appointments. This funding was targeted towards urgent care, with children, people with learning disabilities, autism or severe mental health problems prioritised.

Over several months, the Government has been working with the dental profession to further reduce barriers to patients accessing NHS dentists. This includes changing the way dentists are paid for treatments like root canal, improving communication with patients and making it easier to recruit overseas dentists.

These reforms will allow the best performing dental practices to see more patients and ensure better use of other dental professionals such as dental therapists, hygienists and nurses. Changes will also see dentists rewarded more fairly for complex care.

In September 2022, the Government published Our Plan for Patients, which outlines how the Government will meet oral health needs and increase access to dental care. These will increase access to National Health Service dentistry whilst making the NHS dental contract more attractive to dental practices. NHS England is holding further discussions with the British Dental Association and other stakeholders for additional reforms of the NHS Dental System planned to take place in 2023.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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More specifically, I recognise your concerns about the situation here in Darlington. While there have been some small fluctuations year on year, since 2011 around 330 to 350 dentists in Tees Valley CCG carried out some NHS activity. I also want to assure you that I remain in regular contact with local NHS providers and stand ready to assist them with any concerns. However, if you require urgent treatment, I would advise you to continue to contact NHS 111, details of how to do this can be found here: <https://111.nhs.uk>

I understand there is concern about accessing information on finding an NHS Dentist that may be taking on patients, you can check the below website for any updates on this:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/how-to-find-an-nhs-dentist/>

You can also phone a practice of your choice and ask for an appointment without being registered if you require immediate treatment.

On Wednesday 22nd June 2022 I took part in a debate on NHS Dentistry in England in which I set out, in detail, my views on this issue. You can watch the debate here:

<https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/9c1c3549-e109-4760-89a5-d54218c71b52>

After much lobbying and pushing to bring everyone together, I met with Neil O'Brien MP, Minister for Primary Care and Public Health as well as representatives from the NHS who commissioned Dentistry to discuss this issue. It is regrettable that the current NHS dental service at Firthmoor Community Centre has handed back its NHS contract and will not be continuing to provide NHS dental services after the end of March 2023. However, following my meeting, I have been assured that the NHS is commissioning additional capacity from Darlington providers and at a higher rate of pay. I have attached a briefing I have received from NHS England outlining the action they are taking to replace this capacity and have attached a copy of this which I hope you find informative. I also enclose a copy of a dentistry myth-buster from Healthwatch.

I recently contributed to an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons on dentistry in County Durham. During the debate, Neil O'Brien, Minister for Primary Care and Public Health, confirmed that a comprehensive dental reform plan is underway and that this overhaul will address the 2006 contract made under the Labour government, which limits dentist's ability to take on more patients. He also went on to confirm that there are 1,473 more NHS dentists across the UK since 2010, this is a 6.5% increase.

Furthermore, I encouraged Ministers to look at introducing dentistry into schools. This would potentially be a solution to counteract the difficulties residents in Darlington are facing in accessing appointments, alleviating dental practices of pressure on appointment availability and ensure that children have regular access to dental treatment, this would also ensure children have regular check-ups. I will continue to press my Ministerial colleagues on this point.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Gibson" followed by a long, horizontal flourish.

PETER GIBSON MP