

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Person Vandna Gohil
Company Name Healthwatch Leicestershire
Telephone Number 0116 257 4999
Email Address info@healthwatchleics.co.uk
Web site address www.healthwatchleicestershire.co.uk

Thursday 24 November 2016

PROBLEMS FINDING AN NHS DENTIST? HEALTHWATCH LEICESTERSHIRE HELPS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES IN NEW NATIONAL EVIDENCE REVIEW

- Since Healthwatch Leicestershire was established, people's concerns around dental services have been one of the most common issues raised with national champion Healthwatch England.
- Healthwatch Leicestershire, along with 31 selected local Healthwatch's contributed to a new evidence review that pulled together people's experiences over the last two years.
- Those struggling to access care include - care home residents, those who only go to the dentist when something is wrong and people living in areas where commissioning has not adapted to meet changes in demand.

National surveys suggest that the majority of those who want an NHS dentist are able to get an appointment when they need one and are happy with the service they receive - often leaving positive comments with local Healthwatch review sites and on NHS Choices.

Yet, local Healthwatch also hear from those whose voices are not often reflected through polling, revealing a range of areas for improvement.

Access to NHS Dental Services: What people told local Healthwatch, published today, brings together findings by 31 local Healthwatch across the country, identifying three groups of people in particular struggling to get the dental care they need:

- People who may find it difficult to access high street dentists, such as care home residents.
- People who don't think they need to go to the dentist or only go when they have a problem - often because they are nervous about seeing the dentist, find it too expensive, or just don't see the need to.
- People living in areas where commissioning of NHS treatment has not kept up with changes in demand - e.g. as a result of rapid population growth or demographic change.

A report released by Healthwatch Leicestershire in October 2015¹ listened to 260 local people and found that many people struggle to find and access an NHS dentist locally; in some cases patients are travelling over 10 miles to receive NHS treatment. Those who do find provision are often advised that they will be placed on a waiting list or offered a private appointment.

¹ Your Views about Dental Services <http://alturl.com/w7pd7>

In November 2015 Healthwatch Leicestershire wrote a letter to the Chair of the Local Professional Network (LPN) Leicestershire and Lincolnshire to help effect positive change in the NHS.

Commenting on the report, Interim Chair of Healthwatch England, Jane Mordue said:

“National polling suggests that for most people getting an NHS dentist is pretty straight forward.

“Yet at a local level Healthwatch are uncovering areas where things are not so clear cut, identifying crucial gaps that are leaving patients, in some cases very vulnerable people, without access to the care they need.

“The Government’s new dental contract, with its focus on prevention, looks promising but there is much that could be done right now to help. This could include better information for people about how often they should be going to the dentist, and introducing a more flexible approach to local commissioning so that care can be adjusted to meet demand.

“Above all, where local Healthwatch and the NHS work together we are starting to see the signs of progress, including commitments to increase the numbers of appointments and the opening of new surgeries in badly affected areas. It’s time that these plans were put into action to ensure everyone can get the care they need.”

Chair of Healthwatch Leicestershire, Rick Moore said:

“At a local level, Healthwatch Leicestershire is delighted to be part of the national picture and to contribute to the work of Healthwatch England. Accessing NHS Dental provision is something that has been on our radar for quite some time. We will continue to support the NHS both locally and nationally by promoting the public voice at every opportunity.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Access to NHS Dental Services: What people told local Healthwatch is available here <http://alturl.com/e2kfa>
2. Your Views about Dental Services <http://alturl.com/w7pd7>

About Healthwatch Leicestershire

Healthwatch Leicestershire is an independent consumer champion for health and social care in Leicestershire. The organisation helps to shape and improve local health and social care in our community. Healthwatch Leicestershire is part of the Healthwatch national network, established by the Government to ensure local patients and users have a greater input to shaping and designing local services.

About Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in England. The organisation has independent statutory powers, as stated in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to ensure the consumers’ voice is heard and best practice is delivered in health and social care nationally. Healthwatch is also focused on providing leadership, guidance and support to the development of the Healthwatch network. To find out more please go to www.healthwatch.co.uk.