

## **Report on Salaried Dental Services**

### **Central Bedfordshire Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 24 January 2011**

1. NHS Bedfordshire commissions the Salaried Dental Service (SDS) for residents in Bedfordshire and Luton. The service was established to provide dental treatment for adults and children with special needs and for other patients who are not able to be treated by 'High Street' NHS dentists. It operates from 14 bases across Bedfordshire and Luton.
2. NHS Bedfordshire currently spends £7m per 100,000 people on dental services, which is significantly higher than the average across England and is the third highest in the East of England. Service reviews have indicated that there are two specific areas of spend that are particular outliers: hospital based dental services and the Salaried Dental Service. NHS Bedfordshire has a duty to ensure both quality and value for money from the services it commissions and is rightly looking at how these services can deliver better value. A new minor oral surgery service at Bedford Hospital will improve quality and deliver savings that can be reinvested elsewhere.
3. NHS Bedfordshire commissioners have been in discussions for some time with the SDS to agree how the service can be made more efficient. The current number of bases is having a significant impact on the efficiency of the service. Some locations are open for a limited number of hours per week and see lower numbers of patients. This increases staffing costs; and time spent by specialist dentists travelling between bases (rather than treating patients) also increases costs per patient. In addition, some of the bases require significant investment to bring them up to new CQC infection control standards and DDA compliance, where this is possible.
4. The SDS is also taking forward its own plans to become a social enterprise by April 2011, when the rest of Bedfordshire Community Health Services is divested to another provider. Commissioners have endeavoured to assist the SDS in this venture by working with them to agree a service specification that enables the service to develop its social enterprise business case. For this, we have agreed that a more efficient and viable service will operate from a minimum of eight sites and provide the same level of activity as in the current year and range of services.

5. So, there will be no reduction in the quantum of service, but it is anticipated that efficiencies will be achieved by increased productivity and a reduction in operating costs by reducing the number of bases from which the service operates. The bases under threat are Kempston, Biggleswade, Ampthill, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard. A new facility is opening in Houghton Regis to accommodate the SDS and a new NHS dental practice will be opening in the new Shefford Health Centre, which is due to open in April 2011.
6. It must be stressed that no decisions have been made on the final service configuration. Commissioners have agreed a phased introduction of service efficiencies over two years to support the service during this transitional period.
7. The SDS, in addition to treating patients with special needs, also provides a service for patients who have not been able to access an NHS dentist for reasons such as extreme anxiety or who may require extensive dental requirements following years of neglect. The service is expected to treat such patients and then assist them back into regular NHS dentistry. However, it appears that the majority of these patients have remained with the service. Commissioners fully understand that people become familiar and comfortable with a service, but it should be stressed that this is a specialist service and as such, is an expensive service for routine dental care.
8. The high levels of routine care patients (as many as two-thirds of all patients at some locations) increases costs and impacts on the service's focus on patients with special needs. NHS Bedfordshire has invested significantly in dental services in recent years. There is now capacity across Bedfordshire for anyone to see an NHS dentist. A campaign last year to promote NHS dentistry was extremely successful. The expectation is that the service, as a specialist service, will maintain its focus on patients with special needs and assist patients requiring routine care to move back to regular NHS dentistry.
9. NHS Bedfordshire is currently meeting patients and carers in person at the bases under threat to gain an understanding of their needs, how they use the service and their views on possible changes. Further engagement will take place before any proposals are finalised. NHS Bedfordshire will keep councillors and scrutiny officers fully updated throughout the process and as more information becomes available, through briefings and attendance at scrutiny committees.

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