



Dentistry Disaster in Norwich North

A report by Norwich Green Party

into

the lack of access to NHS Dentists for local people

by:

Dr Rupert Read, Green Party speaker on public services

Stuart Jeffery, Green Party speaker on health

ONE WORLD. ONE CHANCE.

Vote Green Party 

Dentistry Disaster in Norwich North

Just a few month's ago the Green Party produced a damning report on the state of dentistry across the country (A Green New Deal for the NHS), co-authored by Green Party parliamentary candidate for Norwich North Dr Rupert Read.

This additional short report looks at the problems facing people in Norwich trying to access NHS dentists and highlights the real problems faced by residents in the Norwich North constituency.

A survey of dentists in across Norwich, using the NHS Choices website, has revealed that **70%** of dentists practicing in Norwich North are not taking new NHS patients.

Across Norwich as a whole the problem is less with just 50% of dentists not taking new NHS patients, however this remains a very poor position for the people of Norwich.

Dental Health in England

According the World Health Organization: "Oral health is integral to general health"¹, yet unlike most health care in the UK, access to dentistry is not free at the point of need and access to NHS dentists is poor and worsening.

Not only are most patients required to pay for dental health care, good dental health requires regular check ups for most of a person's life. With even NHS dentists charging for care, we think this breaks the fundamental principle of the NHS by not being free at the point of need. Principle 1 of the NHS Constitution² states: "The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all" and Principle 2 says: "Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay." So why do other parties still think that we should pay for basic dental care?

A recent survey by Which found that 8% of the population have had to resort to doing their own dentistry with one in four of these attempting to pull their own teeth with pliers³. This is simply not acceptable. The government claims that access to NHS dentistry is improving, but its own figures show otherwise⁴.

NHS dentistry charges are a regressive tax, hitting the poor hardest and preventing many from getting dental care. A twice yearly check up costs £32.80

assuming that no other intervention is needed. In 2007/08 people in England paid £531 million in NHS dentist charges⁵.

The dental service received £2.1 billion of direct funding in 2007/08. If the current NHS dental service was provided free at the point of use, the total cost to the NHS would increase by £531m to a total of £2.6 billion.

Even access to NHS dentistry is difficult. There is wide variation of access across the country, with evidence obtained by the Green Party under the Freedom of Information Act showing that between 55% and 60% of NHS practices are not taking new NHS patients.

Across the country, the percentage of adults who have visited NHS dentists within the previous 24 months⁵ fell from 51.6% in March 2006 to 48.3% in June 2008 (All patients, inc. children: 55.8% to 52.7%). This means that less than half of the adult population is accessing NHS dentistry and the numbers are continuing to decline.

The percentage of children who visited NHS dentists within the previous 24 months has fallen from 70.7% in March 2006 to 69.0% in June 2008. Only around two thirds of children are visiting NHS dentists.

If the NHS wanted to provide free dentistry to 75% of the population (from the current 50% on the assumption that some people will want to remain private) the total level of funding would need to increase from £2.6 billion to £3.9 billion. As the NHS currently provided just £2.1 billion, an increase in funding of £1.8 billion would be required for patients to have dentistry free at the point of access.

It is clear that NHS dental provision across the country is shambolic and where it exists, regressive taxation prevents people accessing dentistry in contradiction to the NHS's founding principles of care being free at the point of need. Some areas have opted for the addition of fluoride to tap water in a bid improve dental health.

The Green Party views the use of fluoridated water to improve dental health as a "sticking plaster with side effects"⁶ solution. The recent decision by Southampton to fluoridate water supplies against widespread local opposition and with only one in four NHS dentists accepting patients in the city, it is clear they have failed to tackle the underlying problems of dental health.

Any benefit of fluoride has to be weighed against the increased risk of osteosarcoma, fluoridosis of the teeth, mental health problems, behavioural

problems and importantly, mass medication breaches the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine.

The government is firmly backing the fluoridation of tap water across the country and wants to pump hexafluorosilic acid into our drinking water – this breaches our basic human rights and European law. However, the government's backing of fluoride goes much deeper than a misguided understanding of the science, the new Health Secretary, Andy Burnham, was vice president of the British Fluoridation Society, one of the most significant lobby organisations, until just a few weeks ago.

Dental health needs a radical overhaul, real investment and proper access for all. It must stop being a health care choice for the rich.

Norwich Green Party wants:

- Free basic dental care for all
- Proper access to NHS dental services
- No fluoridation of our tap water

References

1. <http://www.whocollab.od.mah.se/expl/systemic.html>
2. http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_093419
3. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7881865.stm>
4. The NHS Information Centre: <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/dentalstats0809q1>
5. <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/primary-care/dentistry/nhs-dental-statistics-2007-08-annual-report>
6. <http://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2009-02-27-fluoridation.html>