

Availability of NHS dentistry

Questionnaire  
and explanatory notes

Spring 2000

Association of Community Health Councils  
for England and Wales

## Introduction

This pack contains everything that your CHC should need to take part in this survey of the availability of NHS dentistry. It is a result of an AGM motion that called upon ACHCEW to conduct such a survey.

We hope that your CHC is able to take part, as we believe that it has the potential to highlight some of the issues surrounding the problems of accessing a NHS dentist.

The pack contains the following:

1. Explanatory notes for the CHC
2. Notes for each "character"
3. Explanatory notes for members and staff involved in the survey
4. The survey questionnaire

## Availability of NHS dentistry Spring 2000

### Explanatory notes for CHCs

The purpose of the exercise is to establish whether dentists are accepting new NHS patients and to ascertain whether the personal circumstances of prospective patients change the response of the dental surgery. To do this we are asking CHC members to call local dentist surgeries by telephone, asking whether they are accepting new NHS patients.

At ACHCEW's AGM last year a motion was passed that raised concerns about some dental practices that were only willing to accept children as NHS patients if their parents registered privately. The motion went on to call for ACHCW to conduct a national survey and name those practices that are only willing to accept children as NHS patients if their parents are registered privately. This survey will investigate this issue.

Members will need to adopt one of four characters (see attached) and work their way through a list of dentists in your CHC's area. It is hoped to cover as many dentists as possible. If your CHC cannot cover all the dental surgeries in your area then cover as many as time and resources allow, no matter how small the number – they will all add to the national picture. However it is important to ensure that each dental surgery surveyed receives a call from all four characters.

We estimate that it should only take a few minutes to survey each dentist. The person conducting the telephone call should not attempt to register but only establish whether the particular surgery is taking on new NHS patients.

The characters have been chosen to establish whether being unemployed and on benefits (and eligible for free treatment) or having children makes any difference to the surgeries' responses.

Once it has been established whether a surgery is accepting new NHS patients, then the caller should go no further. The best "exit strategy" from the call is to say that they must get back to their friend/relative with the details.

Callers also need to note whether the surgery makes any suggestions about the caller towards private dentistry or private dental plans (such as private dental insurance schemes).

Calls to each surgery should be staggered over a few days or weeks, otherwise surgeries may receive calls from all four characters in a matter of a few hours. Members will need to familiarise themselves with the character they have adopted and with the questionnaire. They should ensure that the questionnaire is completed either during or immediately after the call.

If your CHC can only survey a small number of dentists then this will still be beneficial to the survey. However please ensure that a) the surgeries are chosen at complete random and b) that each surgery is called by each of the four characters so that a comparison can be made.

You will need to consider the issue of members' expenses in making the calls or suggest that calls are made from the CHC office.

**Call should be made between 20<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2000 inclusive.**

Once the caller has completed all their calls and filled in all the questionnaires, in they should return them to your CHC. Once you have received all the questionnaires please return them to ACHCEW.

**To enable us to input your results we will need to receive questionnaires by 26<sup>th</sup> April 2000 at the latest.**

Thank you for considering taking part in the survey and we hope that you will be able to take part in this important initiative. ACHCEW will collate the results in May and we hope to publish a full report in July.

## The characters

To spread the workload (amongst Members) each character can be adopted by a number of Members but each Member should only adopt one character.

Before commencing give some careful thought to the characters and adapt them to suit local circumstances, but without changing the key characteristics. For example, be sure to know which road the character lives in (taking care not to give a house number) choosing as best as you are able in your locality a road that meets the circumstances of the patient being portrayed.

It would be best to write down the agreed details of the characters so that members don't make mistakes and give the wrong information.

Members must not divulge any information unless requested and even if asked they should keep responses as simple and concise as possible.

It is not necessary to record the conversation verbatim. All that is required is that the relevant boxes on the questionnaire are ticked whilst making the call or immediately after.

Remember that Members should assume one (but only one) of the following "characters". Each member taking part in the survey should be given one of the following sheets and a list of dentists (and phone numbers) that you wish them to call.

### Character one

**You are the mother / father or friend of the following person:**

Single person male/female

Early twenties

Just moving in to area – in reasonably affluent part of town at an address where it's likely that single people may live i.e. road with flats / maisonettes or small homes

In regular employment – “professional type job”

Good dental history – always attended a dentist regularly, small number of fillings.

Never had private care or any private dental plans

The opening question should take the following format.... it can be changed to suit individual people – but the sense must essentially remain the same

***“Hello...my son/daughter/friend has just moved into the area and wants to register with a dentist as an NHS patient...are you accepting NHS patients?”***

Use this space as an aide memoir to make notes about your character

## Character two

**You are the mother/father or friend of the following person:**

Single person male/female

Early twenties

Just moved into area

Lives in locality – in less affluent area of town at an address where it's likely that single people may live i.e. road with flats / maisonettes or small homes

Unemployed - receives "income based jobseekers allowance" and so is entitled to free NHS treatment

Good dental history – always attended a dentist regularly, small number of fillings.

Never had private care or any private dental plans

The opening question...

***"Hello...my son/daughter/friend has just moved into the area and wants to register with a dentist as an NHS patient...are you accepting NHS patients?"***

Use this space as an aide memoir to make notes about your character

### Character three

**You are the mother/father or friend of the following person:**

Married family member with two children both at local school (know name of school in case asked)

Just moved into area

Lives in locality – in reasonably affluent part of town at an address where it's likely that families may live i.e. road with family homes.

In regular employment and partner works too – both in “professional type jobs”

Good dental history and family always attend dentist regularly - both partners have small number of fillings. Children have no fillings.

Never had private care or any private dental plans

The opening question...

***“Hello...my son/daughter/friend has just moved into the area with his/her wife/husband and children and they want to register with a dentist as an NHS patient...are you accepting NHS patients?”***

**Before finishing the call ensure whether the practice is willing to accept all members of the family as NHS patients.**

Use this space as an aide memoir to make notes about your character



### Character four

**You are the mother/father or friend of the following person:**

Married family member with two children both at school (know name of school in case asked)

Just moved into area

Lives in locality – in less affluent part of town at address where it's likely that families may live i.e. road with family homes

Employed but low income so the family receive "family credit" and qualify for free NHS treatment

Good dental history and family always attend dentist regularly - both partners have small number of fillings. Children have no fillings.

Never had private care or any private dental plans

The opening question...

***"Hello...my son/daughter/friend has just moved into the area with their wife/husband and children and they want to register with a dentist as an NHS patient...are you accepting NHS patients?"***

**Before finishing the call ensure whether the practice is willing to accept all members of the family as NHS patients.**

Use this space as an aide memoir to make notes about your character

## Notes for members/staff taking part in the survey

Thank you for considering taking part in ACHCEW's dental survey. We have asked all CHCs around England and Wales to take part.

Your help in this survey will enable us to add to the debate about the availability of NHS dentistry – something that we know CHC members around the country have concerns about.

We have tried to answer the questions that we feel you may have, and hope that our answers will enable you to agree to take part.

### *What is the purpose of the survey?*

The purpose of the exercise is to establish whether dentists are accepting new NHS patients and to find out whether personal circumstances change the response of the dental surgery.

### *Why is it being done?*

At ACHCEW's AGM last year a motion was passed that raised concerns about some dental practices that were only willing to accept children as NHS patients if their parents registered privately. The motion went on to call for ACHCW to conduct a national survey and name those practices that are only willing to accept children as NHS patients if their parents are registered privately.

### *What personal circumstances are being investigated in the survey and how will the survey be conducted?*

The survey will seek to establish whether being unemployed or having children changes the response to the simple question of whether the practice is accepting new NHS patients. To do this we are asking if you could call local dentist surgeries by telephone and ask whether they are accepting new NHS patients.

You will need to adopt one of four characters that your CHC will have been supplied details of. You will then need to call a list of dentists in supplied by your CHC. It is hoped to cover as many dentists as possible if you cannot

cover all the dental surgeries on your list then let your CHC know and ask them which ones they would like you to call.

### How long will it take me?

We estimate that it should only take a minute or two to survey each dentist. Remember that you should not attempt to actually register but only establish whether a particular surgery is taking on new NHS patients.

### What will I need to say?

You should simply start by asking the question that is printed on your character sheet. You can modify it slightly to suit the way that you would normally speak but make sure that it is essentially asking the same question. Try not to divulge any information unless requested and even then keep your responses as simple and concise as possible.

Once you have established whether or not a surgery is accepting new NHS patients, then go no further with the call. Make an excuse to end the call. We recommend that you say that you must get back to your friend/relative before proceeding further.

### What do I need to record?

You will need to fill in the attached questionnaire for each call made. You simply have to tick the appropriate boxes. There is no requirement to make any additional record of the conversation.

### When should I make the call?

You should make the calls between 20<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2000 inclusive.

### Do I need to make all the calls in one day?

No. Calls can be staggered over a few days or weeks and made at your own convenience.

Will the CHC pay for my calls?

You must check with your CHC about expenses. Your CHC may ask if you can come into the office to use their phone.

I don't like the idea of pretending to be some one I'm not. Is this ethical?

This type of research is viewed by some people to be controversial. However it is a well established form of social research commonly used by many respected organisations. The Consumers Association, for example, regularly employ this technique for surveys for the Which? magazine.

Will I need to remember all the details about the character that I'm pretending to be?

No. As the call is made over the telephone you should write down all the details of your character and have it in front of you as you make the call.

Before commencing give some careful thought to the characters and adapt them to suit local circumstances, but without changing the key characteristics. For example, be sure to know which road that your character's friend/son/daughter lives in (taking care not to give a house number) choosing as best as you are able in your locality a road that meets the circumstances of the patient being portrayed.

When should I fill the questionnaire in?

At the time of making the call or immediately afterwards when you are sure that you can accurately remember what was said to you. If in doubt about any question simply leave it blank.

Do I need to fill in a new questionnaire for each dentist I call?

Yes.

*What if I don't know how many dentists operate from the surgery?*

Your CHC will probably be able to let you know this...if not leave that question blank.

*What do I do once I've called all the dental surgeries?*

Once you have completed all your calls and filled all the questionnaires in then return your questionnaires to your CHC.

We hope that the above points have answered your questions and that you are able to take part. ACHCEW will be collating the results during May and June and we hope to publish the findings in July.

*Thank you in anticipation of your contribution to the survey.*

### Availability of NHS Dentistry Survey

Name of your CHC.....

Name of dental surgery.....

Number of dentists at surgery (if known).....

Town that surgery is located in.....

Date call was made ...../...../ 2000

|                                  |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Character number (please circle) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|

1. What happened following your initial question? (Tick only one box).

A. ☐ I **was not** asked to give any additional information and the surgery told me that **some or all** of their dentists were accepting new NHS patients

B. ☐ I **was not** asked to give any additional information and the surgery told me that **none** of their dentists were accepting new NHS patients

C. ☐ I **was not** asked to give any additional information and the surgery **would not say** whether or not any of their dentists were accepting NHS patients

D. ☐ I **was** asked to give additional information and then the surgery told me that **some or all** of their dentists were accepting new NHS patients

E. ☐ I **was** asked to give additional information and then the surgery told me that **none** of their dentists were accepting new NHS patients

F. ☐ I **was** asked to give additional information but then the surgery **would not say** whether or not any of their dentists were accepting new NHS patients

G. ☐ None of the above

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Remembering that these are the details of the person that you were calling on behalf.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

4. Was the option of private dental treatment or a private dental plan ever mentioned?

Yes [    ]  
No    [    ]

5. Do you feel that the option of private dental treatment or private dental plan was encouraged or promoted to you.

Yes [    ]  
No    [    ]

6. Is there anything else that you feel we should know about the call or comments you would like to make about the call?

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.....  
.....  
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ADDITIONAL QUESTION ONLY FOR CHARACTORS 3 AND 4

7. Was there any suggestion that children would be accepted as NHS patients if their parents became private patients at the dental surgery?

Yes [    ]  
No    [    ]

Thank you for filling in the questionnaire.

Please return these questionnaires to you own CHC.