

## Dental Services – Out of Hours

Our 2003 much-used and successful Guidance and Flow chart about how to ensure patients presenting with dental problems out of hours obtain the timely services of a dental practitioner have been withdrawn.

This is due to the hand-over of responsibility for both medical and dental out of hours services to Norfolk's PCTs. Medical Practitioners faced with dental presentations out of hours these days are inevitably going to be working under the auspices of AMC, and not as "GPs" in the traditional sense, and therefore, the LMC has no substantial influence over these matters, although we retain an interest.

Constituents who also work for AMC and who would like to clarify the current position are directed to the AMC's May newsletter, where the matter is mentioned. Additionally, GPs may be well advised to acquaint themselves with the new arrangements for patients seeking dental treatment out of hours which have been in place since April 2006.

According to the Local Dental Committee :-

*A person in Norfolk or Waveney, who wants a clinical opinion urgently on a dental issue, outside 'core hours' can access the dedicated out of hours telephone line. This line will be switched on at 6 p.m. and switched off at 8.30 a.m., Mondays to Fridays. The weekend telephone service will open at 6 p.m. on a Friday and will continue until 8.30 a.m. on a Monday. At additional holiday times the telephone service will be available on the additional day(s). The telephone number is: **0845 600 3246***

*In addition, a patient who telephones the already nationally available NHS Direct dental triage service (08454647), out of hours, and it is established that the condition is urgent or an emergency, will be transferred to someone with our local information and directed to the appropriate service*

According to the PCTs :-

*"Patients who require emergency care are those requiring immediate attention in order to minimise the risk of serious medical complications or prevent long term dental complications. Their condition means they are most likely to present in Accident and Emergency Departments with:*

- *uncontrollable dental haemorrhage following extractions;*
- *rapidly increasing swelling around the throat or eye;*
- *trauma confined to the dental arches.*

*Patients who require urgent care are those requiring attention for:*

- *severe dental and facial pain not controlled by over the counter preparations;*
- *dental and soft tissue acute infection.*

*A number of individuals currently access care from out of hours services who are not in pain and present for treatment regarding non urgent problems, such as broken dentures, dislodged crowns, patients requiring permanent restoration and patients using the service as their regular dentist.*

***Primary Care Trusts in Norfolk have made arrangements so that patients with an urgent condition, presenting out of hours, can be seen within a reasonable distance and within 24 – 48 hours and patients identified through telephone triage will be directed to the service nearest their residence, at present, either in Norwich, Kings Lynn or Great Yarmouth”***

The LMC is concerned, albeit indirectly, that

1. The 30 minutes difference between Dental surgeries closing (6pm) and GP surgeries closing (6.30pm) on weekdays may encourage registered patients phoning their GPs during this time for assistance with dental problems
2. Patients are unlikely to be willing to put up with, for example, dental pain not controlled by OTC medication for 48 hours.

This information sheet is, therefore, an interim publication pending further clarification from the PCTs, AMC and the LDC whose responses are awaited to date

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