

**TO: All GPs in the Northern, Southern,
South Eastern and Eastern LCG areas.**

BY EMAIL ONLY

Strategic Planning and Performance Group

County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
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Date: 25 July 2022

Dear Colleague

Arrangements for Emergency Dental Centres from 30 July Onwards

I realise providing out-of-hours cover has been a particularly challenging element of the pandemic for practitioners. I would like to thank the dentists who have provided urgent dental services at the UDCCs over the last two years and also the GPs who have managed their own out-of-hours services during this period.

The easing of IPC requirements means that we are now in a position to commence a trial of direct access for out-of-hours dental emergencies beginning on Saturday, 30 July 2022. This service will be provided at weekends, and recognised public holidays/exceptional days only. However, it is important to note that, due to the continuing challenges of the pandemic this trial of direct access will not have the same capacity that existed prior to Covid. I am therefore asking GPs to work with us and continue to see urgent dental cases (registered and unregistered patients alike in accordance with RSS terms) during normal working hours, to avoid overloading this preliminary out-of-hours service.

It is important you are aware that if this trial service is not successful, in the sense that it is unable to meet the demand for dental emergency care, SPPG would have to look at alternative ways of providing this service. The stepping down of the service could occur if patients with dental emergencies, both registered and unregistered, are not managed fully during the week. In the event that the service was not able to cope with demand, in the first instance out-of-hours care would have to revert back to individual practice responsibility until such times as alternative arrangements could be put in place.

It is therefore in everyone's best interests to work together, especially during the summer period, to reduce the pressure on this service, and assist those dental colleagues working in these initial direct access out-of-hours clinics.

For your information here are the key details on the initial out-of-hours service:

- **Start Date:** Saturday, 30 July 2022.
- **Operating Days:** Saturdays, Sundays and recognised public holidays/exceptional days only.
- **Designated Patient Out-of-Hours Dental phone line:** 028 25663510 taking calls between 8am-12 noon only.

- **Operating Model:** Patients, registered and unregistered, meeting the criteria of a dental emergency outlined in the attached practice answerphone script, may phone between 8am- 12 noon for advice, and if deemed clinically necessary, will be allocated an appointment at an Emergency Dental Clinic (EDC) depending on capacity at these clinics. Note that capacity may vary from site to site.
- **Triage and Appointment Allocation:** Patients will be allocated appointments by dentists on the Central Triage Team based at Dalriadra Urgent Care (DUC). **This is not a walk in service**, and patients must be triaged first by calling the Designated Patient Out of Hours Phone Line. Depending on capacity, patients may be asked to travel to an EDC which may not be their nearest.
- **Entitlement to use EDCs for Out-of-Hours Cover:** Dentists must apply to avail of this out-of-hours service and participate in rotas. Rota application forms will soon be issued to those practitioners who have indicated their willingness to participate via the recent survey. Anyone else wishing to join the rota may do so by emailing GDS.correspondence@hscni.net
- **GDPs not on Rota:** Dentists who do not wish to avail of this out-of-hours service will be contacted by SPPG to outline their alternative out-of-hours arrangements.
- **Monitoring Arrangements:** All patient calls to the Out-of-Hours Dental Phone line will be checked, including GDP details, to assist in tracking of dentists/practices who are using this out-of-hours service. SPPG will use this information to monitor compliance.
- **Answerphone message:** A recommended script for those dentists who have opted to join the EDC rota is attached. This message must only be used for weekends, and additional public holidays/exceptional days.
- **Patient charges:** Following an initial set-up period, patient payment contributions will be payable in the EDCs for patients who normally pay Health Service charges.

Yours sincerely



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