



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

ATISN 15715

December 2021

Dear

ATISN 15715 – Access to a NHS dentist in Port Talbot during the Covid-19 pandemic

I am responding to your email which was received on 29 November, complaining about our response to your request for information under the Freedom of Information (“FOI”) Act 2000. This letter is to inform you of the outcome.

In your original request dated 26 November, you requested:

Details of numbers/percentages of patients that these ‘private practices’ take on via NHS funding. Whole of Wales’s figures if please.

We had interpreted this to mean:

How many people are choosing private dentistry (on an all-Wales basis) because they have been unable to access a NHS dentist for routine care?

We provided a response that indicates the Welsh Government did not hold the information you were requesting. The Welsh Government does not have information relating to the number of patients choosing private dentistry.

I have reviewed our response to your FOI request in accordance with the procedure stated in my previous letter to you (dated 29 November). I agree that our interpretation of your request may not have been correct and that full clarification should have been sought if it was unclear as to what information you were seeking, however, I do not uphold your complaint.

On 29 November, you were able to clarify that you did not request the number of NHS patients that needed to use private dental services but wished for information as follows:

The numbers/percentages of patients that these private practices are expected to facilitate from NHS funding e.g. for every 100 patients at a dentist facility, how many are NHS and not purely private.

I can confirm the Welsh Government does not hold recorded information relating to the number of patients accessing private dentistry.

The majority of dentists are independent self-employed practitioners who are free to choose whether they contract a proportion of their time to provide NHS treatment on behalf of health boards. As a consequence, they may provide only NHS care, work totally outside the NHS or as is commonly the case, provide a mixture of NHS and private dental care. We have no powers of compulsion in this matter.

The way the dental contract typically operates is that the health board enters into a contract with a dentist willing to provide NHS services, with the contract detailing an agreed level/amount of NHS treatment for a set amount of funding.

During the 2 years ending 31 March 2020 around 54.8% of the population in Wales accessed NHS dental services, although this figure has been impacted on by the pandemic. However, some people choose private dental care, while others choose not to see a dentist routinely unless they develop a specific problem.

If you remain dissatisfied with this response you also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Tel: 01625 545 745
Fax: 01625 524 510
Email: casework@ico.gsi.gov.uk

Also, if you think that there has been maladministration in dealing with your request, you have the option to make a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales who can be contacted at:

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
Bridgend
CF35 5LJ

Telephone: 0845 6010987 (local rate)
Email: ask@ombudsman-wales.org.uk

You also requested the additional information:

*How many dentists refuse NHS patients in each of the trust areas?
What percentage of the Welsh population are currently unable to access a dentist under NHS treatment?*

I can confirm the Welsh Government does not hold information relating to dentists refusing NHS patients or in relation to patients who are unable to access a dentist for NHS treatment.

I understand that colleagues have previously written to you explaining there is no expectation anyone should need to seek dental treatment privately and about the very specific set of circumstances during the pandemic – seeing patients according to need while Amber Alert restrictions are still needed. I also understand that you have been given a specific contact at your Health Board to discuss your current circumstances and broken tooth, with a view to getting an appointment.

If dental treatment is urgent or you are in pain, there is provision in place to provide care quickly. However, there will be a delay for new patients looking for routine care. Management of the expected longer waits many patients will experience is unfortunately an inevitable consequence of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Slade', with a stylized initial 'A'.

Alex Slade
Deputy Director for Primary Care