

## **DENTIST**

### **How can I find a dentist?**

There are several ways you can find a dentist –

- ask friends, neighbours or colleagues for personal recommendations
- look in Yellow Pages where many dentists (both NHS and private) now advertise. Private dentists will usually list any particular areas in which they specialise: NHS Direct 0845 4647
- contact your local Health Authority who will have a list of all NHS dentists in your area (but note that they will not be able to make any recommendations)
- lists of dentists are also available from Post Offices and Main Libraries.

### **Can I mix private and NHS treatment?**

Yes. Everything you may need to keep your mouth healthy can be provided under the NHS. However, if you are looking for a particular type of specialist treatment – or treatment that is not strictly necessary for your dental health such as a cosmetic procedure – you can choose to have this provided on a private basis. Discuss the matter with your dentist before deciding which option suits you best.

### **Can I go to any dentist?**

Yes. Dentists operate differently from doctors and therefore do not have specific 'catchment' areas. If you are registered with a particular dentist and move out of the area, you do not need to change dentists. With NHS treatment you remain registered with your dentist for 15 months after your last course of treatment: the dentist can drop you from their list after this time if you do not keep up with check ups.

### **How will I know that a dentist has all the necessary training and qualifications?**

All practising dentists must be registered with the General Dental Council. This is a statutory body, which protects patients by ensuring that all practising dentists are properly trained. A qualified dentist will have the letters BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) or LDS (Licentiate in Dental Surgery) after their name. You should choose a dentist with whom you feel comfortable and whom you can trust to work with you to maintain good oral and dental health.

### **How do I register with a dentist?**

Firstly, you should decide whether you want a private or NHS dentist and then check that the dentist you choose is still accepting patients. Most dentists will only treat you after an initial examination and will only keep you on their register if you attend for regular check-ups. If you are registered with an NHS dentist and do not attend at least every 15 months, you may be removed from the list.

### **What about charges?**

NHS fees are set by the Department of Health and, in most cases; patients pay 80% of the charges up to a set limit (currently £348). Some people are exempt from charges, including children less than 18 years of age (except over-16s who need dentures), pregnant and nursing mothers and adults receiving certain types of benefit. Private fees can vary quite considerably from one dentist to another. It is always best to ask about charges before starting treatment. An NHS dentist is obliged to give you an estimate for all but the simplest treatment, and it's always best to agree private dental charges before treatment begins. Check what the average fees are for a check-up and any treatment you might need, like a scale and polish, a crown or a filling.

Whether you choose a private or an NHS dentist, you should be told clearly before you start what the fees will be. Ask for a written treatment plan, which will list the treatment and the appropriate fees. There are several dental capitation programmes available including Denplan and BUPA DentalCover (these provide all the dental treatment you need for a regular monthly payment), and several dental insurance schemes such as CIGNA (insurance schemes may limit the amount they will cover depending on the amount you pay). It is important to check whether your dentist accepts patients under these schemes and what the relative costs would be. You also need to be in good dental health before you will be accepted on to one of these schemes.

### **Checklist of points to consider when choosing a dentist**

- does the practice offer treatment on the NHS, privately or both?
- what is the range of treatments offered?
- what fees are charged for check-ups and for common procedures. (NHS charges are the same wherever you go, but it may be worth checking)
- does the practice accept patients covered under dental capitation programmes / insurance schemes?
- is the practice easy to get to and accessible to wheelchairs, prams and so on, as relevant for your needs?
- what are the practises open hours?
- is there provision for emergency consultation and treatment out of hours? NHS dentists are obliged to provide emergency cover.
- is the dentist sympathetic / understanding to nervous or fearful patients?
- do they do children's dentistry, and is it a child friendly practise with a play area etc?
- do they offer cosmetic treatments?
- do they routinely offer a choice of pain relief and sedation if needed?

### **Do they operate a recall system when check-ups are due?**

It is often a good idea to visit the practice you are interested in to check the general appearance of the premises, cleanliness, facilities, availability of parking and friendliness / helpfulness of staff. The NHS requires practices to produce a leaflet outlining the way they operate – ask the receptionist for any written information that may be available.

### **Useful websites:**

**[www.bda-findadentist.org.uk](http://www.bda-findadentist.org.uk)**

**[www.bupa.co.uk](http://www.bupa.co.uk)**

**[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**