

Give Dental practices and their staff the “key worker” status

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Hydref 2020
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Petition title: Give Dental practices and their staff the “key worker” status

Text of petition: During the initial Covid-19 outbreak dental practices were staggered to be classed as “non essential medical” despite our roles saving lives through urgent infection care and early oral cancer detection. There are huge systemic risks associated with poor oral health which can’t be ignored. We also don't want to be in a position again where our patients could be left in pain due to Welsh Government regulations severely limiting the range of emergency treatments possible.

For decades dentistry had lead the way with cross infection control and utilisation of PPE. Alongside social distancing waiting areas, dental practices have now equipped themselves with the highest level of PPE, including respirators and full gowns to ensure they protect themselves, their staff and their patients, mitigating the risks no matter what the infection rate in the locality is.

Please support us to continue to care for our patients and provide what we judge to be appropriate dental treatments even if local or national lockdown measure are re-introduced.



1. Background

On 17 March 2020, a [letter from the Chief Dental Officer \(CDO\) for Wales](#) stated that routine dentistry ‘as normal’ was no longer sustainable due to the coronavirus pandemic. Urgent Dental Centres (UDCs) were established across Wales and were staffed and equipped with enhanced personal protective equipment (PPE), for provision of emergency and urgent dental service provision in every Health Board.

The Welsh Government published [Dental care during the COVID-19 pandemic: guidance for teams](#) on 8 April 2020, which explained how dental teams should work from 23 March 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic.

The CDO noted in a [statement](#) on 6 June 2020 that dentists in Wales had remained open for urgent care throughout the lockdown. They had seen 10,000 people in practices and provided 125,000 consultations remotely, via phone or video services. Pain relief and antibiotics had continued to be prescribed where necessary.

Fifteen urgent dental care centres were opened covering the whole country. These centres provided emergency treatment to more than 4,000 people, which included extractions, opening teeth to drain abscesses and treating traumatic injuries.

A [Wales De-escalation Pandemic Plan for Dentistry](#) was published by the Welsh Government on 4 June 2020. This plan provided information on the **de-escalation alert levels** and what dental services would be available under each level. [Restoration of dental services following COVID-19: guidance](#) was also made available.

On 16 June 2020 the Welsh Government produced its [Standard Operating Process](#) for Non-COVID-19 Dental Centres Providing Aerosol Generating Procedures in Wales, which set out a Red/Amber/Green alert level structure for de-escalating the response to Covid-19.

The [Welsh Government confirmed](#) on 30 June 2020 that further services were being gradually reinstated, although it is likely to be some time before the full range of services – including those dental procedures that generate aerosols– will be reintroduced. Dental services were able to move to the amber phase of de-escalation, meaning all dental practices in Wales were able to open from 22 June 2020 for urgent, non-aerosol care.

On 8 September 2020, the CDO issued a statement on local lockdown protocol for Wales, after Wales' first local lockdown in Caerphilly commenced. In the statement the CDO reiterated the fact that Wales remains in amber alert and consequently certain requirements still hold for dental services. The CDO went on to say that practices can oscillate between high and low amber based on local circumstances. In order to observe travel restrictions and local lockdown, practices need to concentrate on urgent and essential care and not invite patients to travel in or out of local lockdown area for routine care and assessment that can be delayed.

2. Welsh Parliament action

The British Dental Association (BDA) Cymru gave evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on 2 July 2020. During the meeting, it was noted that dentists had not been explicitly listed as key workers on the Welsh Government website and there had been anecdotal evidence that some dentists, and more so their teams, were subsequently not able to access childcare during the pandemic.

Following its evidence to the Committee, BDA Cymru submitted written evidence to support the issues raised. This written evidence set out some areas where BDA Cymru would have liked immediate action to be taken, including:

Identify all dental team members as key workers

We need all practice staff, including private contractors, to be able to work and to provide care during the de-escalation period of lockdown. Without key worker status, many dentists are not eligible for childcare, especially as we head towards the summer holidays. Extending key worker status to the whole dental team is vital.

The situation has changed since BDA Cymru submitted its written evidence, but it is unclear what the status of dental team members would be in any future lockdown.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.