



27<sup>th</sup> October 2020

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To  
Patients registered with NHS dental practices

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Dear patient,

You will be well aware of the impact that the risk of COVID-19 has had on every aspect of what was 'normal' life, particularly in the central belt. As you know the provision of routine dental care has also been affected, with the Chief Dental Officer closing all the NHS dental practices in Scotland, when Lockdown was imposed in March of this year. This step was taken in part to support social distancing by reducing the close contact between patients and dentists in a practice and in part because when your dentist provides treatment for you the drills and cleaning tools used create a fine mist of a mix of water and your saliva. This fine mist or aerosol could pose a risk in terms of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19

Since then, everyone in your dental practice has worked incredibly hard to design processes and procedures to ensure that anyone who enters, patient or staff, is kept safe. As a result, when the First Minister announced during the summer that dental practices could open their doors to treat patients with emergencies as the first part of the Phased recovery, your practice was one of the first in the country to open.

These safety processes have been tried and tested, and shown to be safe and there has been a gradual increase in the range of NHS dental care available, but this has had to be carefully planned nationally, in order to ensure everyone's safety.

This confidence in the safety of dentistry has allowed the Scottish Government to announce that from the beginning of November, dentists can deliver the full range of care that was available under the NHS prior to lock-down. This news is really welcome news for us all as your dentist can now "finish the job" that has been started by managing urgent care needs.

However, whilst the full range of care CAN now be delivered there are additional complexities that have come to the fore as a result of the last 8-months.

Firstly, and most importantly, safety for you as a patient and for the dental team needs to be maintained so social distancing, allowing any mist in the surgery to settle, and the thorough cleaning of surfaces, all takes a significant amount of time. This means that the time when the dental surgery can't be used between appointments will be longer to support safe practice, resulting in fewer appointments being available in the normal working day.

Secondly, eight months of routine dental care has not been delivered between March and October, resulting in a substantial backlog of care that is required. The delivery of care by your dentist will have to be prioritised to ensure that people with pain or have the potential to lose a tooth are treated first and procedures that are desirable but have a lesser priority



in terms of the practice as a whole may need to be delayed until the backlog has been managed and this will take a substantial amount of time with the current restrictions.

Covid-19 has disrupted nearly all aspects of life and it looks like it will do for some months to come. This means that in dentistry, like every other aspect of healthcare in the NHS, appointments may take months to be available and a return to “normal service” will undertake a considerable time. As a result I must ask to be patient as we endeavour to re-establish your dental care. Please be reassured that, your dentist and NHS Lothian have your health at the centre of their thoughts, and is striving to deliver your dental care as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully

Angus Walls

Director of Dentistry NHS Lothian