

GP's & Dental Prescribing

The responsibilities of a dentist

- General dental practitioners have an ethical responsibility to provide reasonable access to advice and emergency treatment for their patients, including those who are seen under a private contract.
- A dentist's immediate responsibility for in-hours urgent dental care applies to patients who are currently undergoing or have recently completed a course of dental treatment with them.
- Dentists are obliged to issue NHS prescriptions to NHS patients where required. They also have a duty of care to issue private prescriptions to private patients.
- Any dentist can issue a NHS prescription to a NHS patient having determined a need for it. Failure to do so could leave the dentist open to a charge of serious professional misconduct.
- Dentists normally prescribe both NHS and private prescriptions from the Dental Formulary.
- Dentists should be encouraged to tell their patients that a private prescription should be dispensed privately and to advise them against approaching their NHS GP.
- A dentist does not have to be personally available to see patients 24 hours a day.
- Dentists should make appropriate arrangements to ensure that patients for whom responsibility has been accepted have access to emergency treatment outside normal working hours and that such arrangements are made known to patients.

The responsibilities of a GP

- GPs and practice teams should make themselves aware of in hours and out-of-hours dental services available locally to manage urgent and emergency dental conditions. This may include NHS Choices, NHS 111, local dental access centres and local NHS dentists. This information should be available from local commissioning and planning bodies.
- GPs should not attempt to manage a condition requiring dental skills unless they have the appropriate training and expertise. Both the civil courts and the GMC require doctors to have appropriate skills for any treatment they offer.
- If GPs choose to treat a patient themselves such treatment would be provided under general medical services and the level of skill and degree of care the GP would be expected to exercise is that of a general medical practitioner.
- The treatment of dental problems is not the responsibility of GPs. In an emergency, the patient should be advised to contact local urgent or emergency dental services, or in severe circumstances the nearest accident and emergency department.
- If a patient asks a GP to supply an NHS prescription the GP must refuse unless they are sure they are able to accept sole responsibility for that prescribing decision (see health circular EL(91)127 at annex 2). If a legitimate need for an NHS prescription cannot be established, under paragraph 39(1) of contractual terms (see annex 1), it should not be provided.

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- GPs should not convert private dental prescriptions into NHS prescriptions.
- GPs should also be aware of the following legal and contractual obligations :
 - Before refusing to treat a patient asking for emergency dental treatment, a GP must ascertain that the condition requires only dental treatment. Primary care teams must put themselves in a position to judge the nature of the patient's condition by undertaking reasonable enquiries and where appropriate a clinical assessment. This does not place an obligation on the part of the GP to treat a dental condition.
 - Having established an apparent dental problem, GPs or practice teams should signpost to a dentist or local emergency service or if they feel necessary refer a patient for any further assessment and treatment, to secondary care.
 - Everyone in the practice team must do their best to ensure the patient doesn't need the attention of a GP when signposting.
 - If the patient has no usual dentist, or there is no response from the usual dentist, the patient should contact the local NHS 111 (England), NHS 24 (Scotland), NHS Direct or local dental help-lines (Wales) or the Health and Social Care Board (Northern Ireland).
 - Patients presenting with signs of spreading infection or systemic involvement of a dental infection should be referred immediately to secondary care for appropriate surgical management. Signs and symptoms of this may include, diffuse or severe facial swelling, trismus, dysphagia, fever or malaise.

Oral cancer - Many patients may present to GP surgeries with oral pathologies including suspected oral cancers. GP surgeries must be aware of the local arrangements in place for the urgent referral pathway for suspected oral cancer cases. A patient who sees a GP or another member of the practice clinical team with a non-suspicious oral pathology should also be advised to see a dentist for full examination as soon as possible

Responsibilities of a CCG

- NHS commissioning and planning bodies are responsible for the provision of out-of-hours dental care. Most provide emergency out-of-hours dental treatment for patients. Commissioning and planning bodies may also buy in-hours open access urgent sessions from dental practices.
- GPs and practice teams should make themselves aware of in hours and out-of-hours dental services available locally to manage urgent and emergency dental conditions. This may include NHS Choices, NHS 111, local dental access centres and local NHS dentists. This information should be available from local commissioning and planning bodies.

References:

- Health Circular EL (91) 127 in England]
- GPC- Patients presenting with dental problems: GP responsibilities December 2005 (updated February 2006)
- BMA- Patients presenting with possible dental problems. 16.12.2016