

NHSE Midlands and East (East) - Dental Out-of-Hours Procurement

I write to inform you of NHS England Midlands and East (East's) intention to re-procure Dental Out-of-Hours (OOHs) services across the East of England. The OOHs service is available for patients requiring urgent dental treatment outside of core hours for dental practices, i.e. weekends and Bank Holidays.

NHS England Midlands and East (East) is intending to re-procure the service because a number of the existing contracts are due to expire in 2017. There are currently a number of different services operating across the East, with differing levels of service provision and access. A key objective of the procurement is to ensure that we commission an equitable service, with improved accessibility, for patients across the patch.

The areas of Essex, Suffolk and Great Yarmouth and Waveney will be procured in 2016-17. Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will follow in 2017-18. This is due to differing contract expiry dates.

NHS England Midlands and East (East) has invited members of the Local Dental Committee and Clinical Commissioning Groups to review the new specification and has collected patient input from an East-wide survey and focus groups.

As discussed, below are some bullet points to give an overview of the dental out-of-hours procurement.

- A review of the existing provision was undertaken prior to the procurement commencement. There are currently a total of 26 providers delivering the service across the East, a number of contracts for which are expiring in March 2017. These contracts differ in type, location, cost, and opening and access hours. A key objective of the procurement is to ensure we commission an equitable service, with improved accessibility, for patients across the patch.
- The procurement is currently out at the Invitation to Tender stage and is aiming to procure services to start on the 1st April 2017. The procurement is broken down into three separate lots - South East and South West Essex, Mid and West Essex and Suffolk and Great Yarmouth and Waveney.
- Patient access has been a key focus in planning this procurement. We have not specified service delivery locations in the service specification, however we have included strong parameters and the prospective bids will be evaluated reflecting the importance of patient access to the proposed locations. It is therefore possible/likely that the service locations will change (please note that this is an urgent care service and patients do not regularly attend). We will not be reducing the number of locations the service is delivered from per day of service delivery in each area. Access will be increased because patients can be referred across geographical boundaries (they are not currently).
- Patient engagement has also been an important part of the planning; we held patient focus groups and developed an online survey. The online survey was open for 6 weeks and promoted through Healthwatches, CCGs and local

authorities. The survey received 100 responses, from which we have gained an insight into the public's awareness, understanding and use of the out-of-hours service. In particular, this will influence our communications strategy during the mobilisation period, taking the opportunity to advertise to patients the NHS 111 'one front door' to the service and when it should be used. Focus groups held in Suffolk and Norfolk provided patient views on distance to travel, which gives us a useful – and localised - benchmark to assess the provider bids against. (Note, it had been intended that we would run other focus groups but circumstances unfortunately did not allow for this).

- The re-procurement has enabled us to:
 - Create economies of scale to secure better value for money
 - Change the opening hours to allow for improved access (10am – 4pm, typically are currently 9am – 1pm)
 - Incorporate within the service specification the requirement that the provider follows national standards to ensure patients receive the best quality urgent care and are encouraged to see a dentist regularly
 - Create flexibility in the service to flex during surge periods
 - Introduce an element of triage which will reduce the number of patients requiring to travel for face-to-face treatment
 - Collect regular data so we can understand how the service is being used and where improvements could potentially be made

The current commissioning arrangements are very varied across the East and unfortunately it is not easy to summarise everything. However, I can assure you that we have a comprehensive understanding of the current services and the procurement is very much intended to improve the service and ensure equity of provision for the population.

If you have any other queries, please contact: Laura Cooper, Assistant Contract Manager, Primary Care Team – South and West Essex, NHS England – Midlands& East (East); Email: laura.cooper16@nhs.net; Telephone: 01138 249079 | Mobile: 07918336041

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