


NHS England focus on community dental services

10 February 2025  Joanna Wallace

The Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) programme is a national NHS England programme designed to improve treatment and care by reviewing health services in England. The programme involves undertaking clinical-led reviews of specialities to examine how things are being done and how they could be improved. GIRFT identifies changes that will help improve care and outcomes, as well as delivering efficiencies.

Focus on community dental services

A recent supplementary report published by GIRFT in January 2025 has shed light on Community Dental Services (CDS), following an analysis of hospital dentistry in a separate report. CDS cater to the dental needs of children and adults with special needs throughout the UK, with a network of 68 services nationwide.

Addressing the challenges

The strain on NHS dentistry frequently captures public attention, highlighting a significant gap in service availability.

Lord Darzi's independent investigation of the NHS in England published in September 2024 stated that:

"Good dental health is essential for adults and children alike. Yet only about 30 and 40 per cent of NHS dental practices are accepting new child and adult registrations respectively. There are wide variations in the number of NHS dentists per population in different areas of the country. Rural and coastal communities particularly lack access to NHS dentistry."

CDS providers stand out as crucial players in bridging this gap, especially for patients with special needs.

Insights from the report

The development of this report involved the collaboration of 25 experts across various roles and information collated from a 100% response rate to the GIRFT questionnaire sent to providers. The report offers recommendations aimed at enhancing various facets of community dentistry, notably in prevention – a critical area considering that dental issues are the leading cause of hospital admissions among children in the UK for tooth extractions (which usually involve general anaesthetic).

Key findings highlight the challenges of managing locally held waiting lists, variable governance structures, inconsistent performance reporting, and a diverse range of organisational models among CDS providers. To address these issues, the report outlines recommendations focusing on safety, data capture, governance, networking and shared care, workforce training and education, and service delivery improvements. The report provides providers with an actionable guide and checklist.

Liz Jones OBE, GIRFT Clinical Lead for Hospital Dentistry, emphasises the pivotal role of CDS providers in transitioning care from hospitals to community settings, particularly for vulnerable populations. She also comments that to date there has been limited advocacy for the CDS and hopes that this report will change that.

Browne Jacobson's commitment

At Browne Jacobson, we understand the challenges faced by all community dentistry practitioners, often representing them in claims. We are dedicated to supporting dentists as they navigate these challenges. Our specialist dentistry team is here to help. For guidance and support, please reach out to us.

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