



# Reviewing patient experience of dental services in Redbridge

Supplementary findings:  
Mystery Shopper Survey

July - December 2021



# Reviewing patient experience of dental services in Redbridge

## Introduction

This is our supplementary report which details our mystery shopper exercise responses.

## Mystery Shopper Exercise

Healthwatch Redbridge staff and rang all dental practices in Redbridge who were identified as offering NHS services as part of their service. Using an NHS online search engine<sup>1</sup> we were able to identify 39 practices in Redbridge offering NHS services.

A scenario (see Appendix 1) was created to ensure comparable data was obtained. Information identified whether practices were able to offer an urgent appointment to a patient who was not on the practice's patient list, whether patients were signposted if the practice could not offer an NHS appointment or offered a private appointment.

We contacted the 39 NHS dental practices we were able to identify in the borough, managing to speak to 31 (79%) of those practices. Eight practices had their answer phone on each time we tried to ring them even though we phoned at different times of the day on each occasion. As this was a Mystery Shopper exercise, we did not leave a message.

## Exercise Objectives

Using volunteers as mystery shoppers, we wanted to clarify whether patients who do not belong to a specific dental practice were able to book an urgent/emergency appointment. We also wanted to discover whether patients may be offered a private appointment if an NHS one was unavailable.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Redbridge (HWR) would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project including our HWR volunteers who conducted the Mystery Shopper exercise.

## Disclaimer

Please note that this supplementary report relates to findings from our Mystery Shopper exercise conducted between 15<sup>th</sup> July and 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

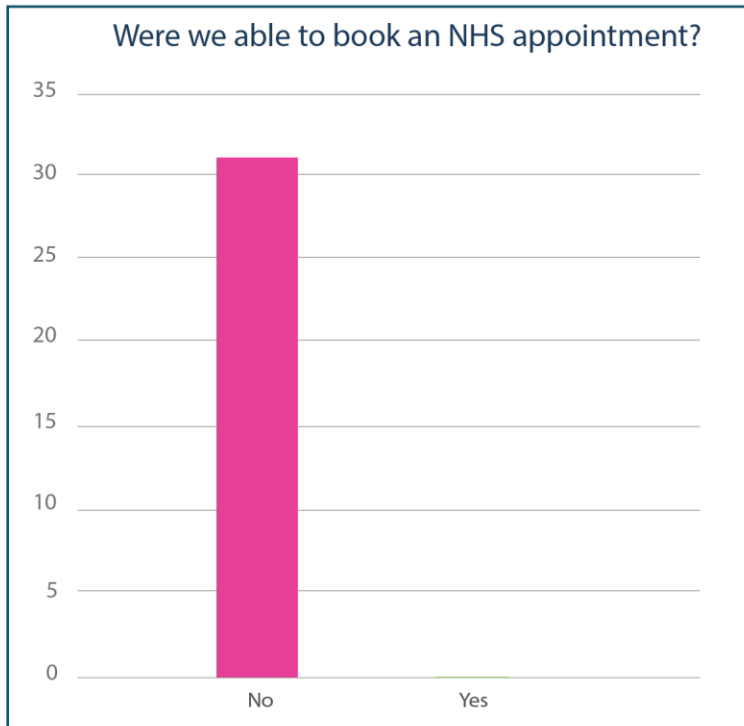
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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the NHS Website <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

## Mystery Shopper Exercise: Findings

### Urgent NHS appointments: 31 contacted - 31 responses

**NONE** of the 31 practices contacted could offer an **URGENT** appointment to someone who was not considered to be a patient at the practice already.



**Graph 4**

Additionally, over **50% (16)** of those practices confirmed they were not taking on any new NHS patients and **6** practices said they expected to begin taking new NHS patients again. This ranged from September 2021 to next year:



*“We are not taking any new NHS patients until September (2021).”*

*“No NHS, can't get onto list until next year (2022).”*



Instead of an NHS appointment, one practice offered our volunteer a private appointment on the same day.



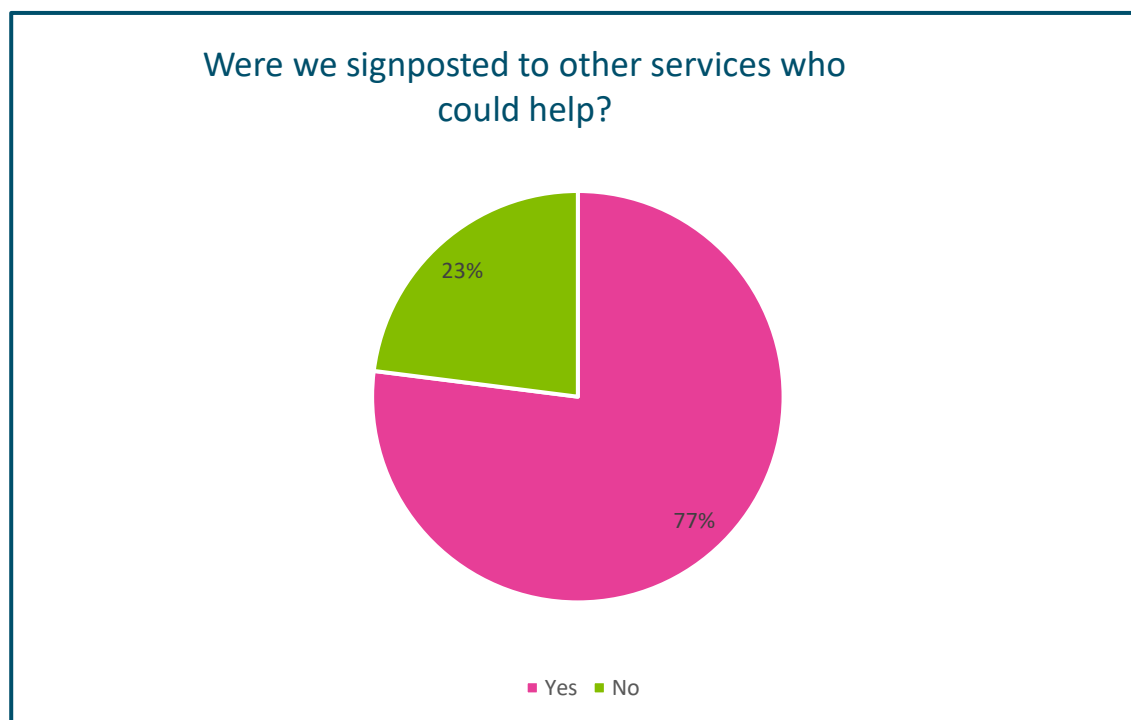
*“I was told sorry, but they cannot offer me an NHS appointment today, as I am not registered with the practice, but I was then immediately told that they can offer an appointment today if I pay £45. When I asked if the dentist could definitely see me today, she said yes.” (HWR Volunteer)*

## Comment

It was not a surprise that we could not book an appointment as this is what patients have been telling us for the last few months. We have heard from several patients who have each rung more than ten dentists with no success and one patient who told us they rang all the practices in Redbridge with no success.

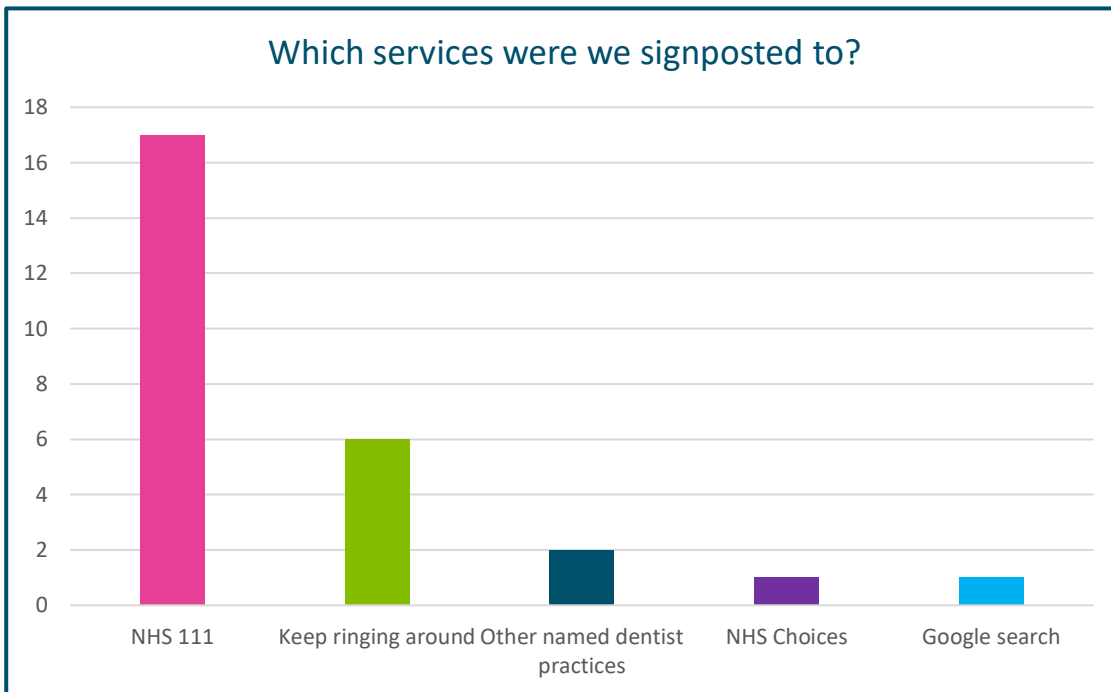
## Signposting

When practices told us they could not offer an urgent NHS appointment, we asked what else we could do.



**Pie Chart 10**

The majority of practices, (24, 77%) signposted our staff and volunteers to other services who could help.



**Graph 5**

The majority of practices, **17 (56%)**, signposted our staff and volunteers to NHS 111, six advised us to keep ringing around, two to other specific dentist practices they thought might be able to help, with one mentioning the NHS website to search for dentists and one suggesting a general google search.

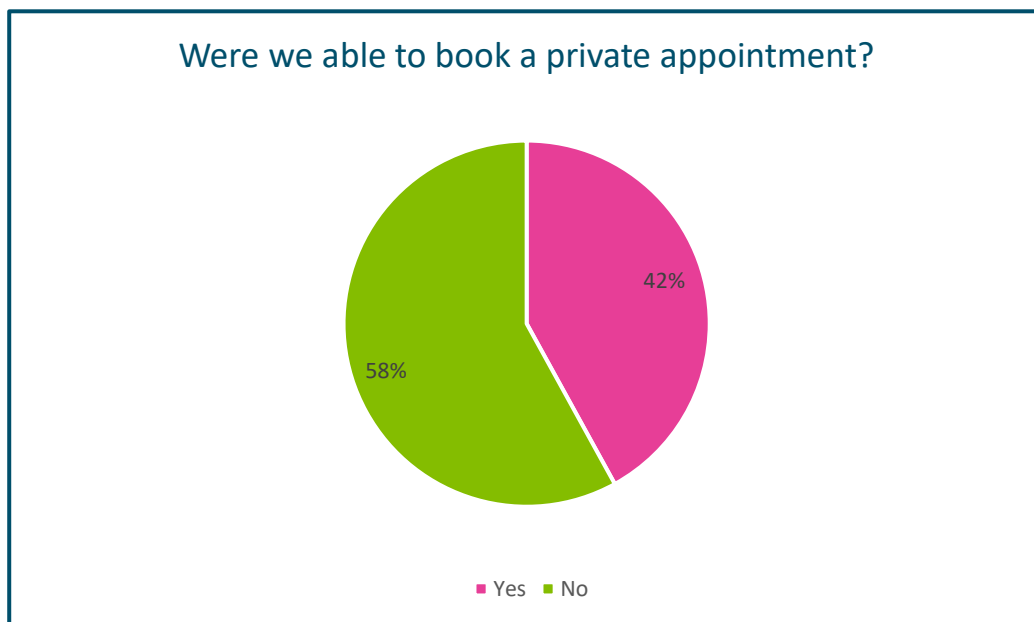


*“Ring 111, they will give a list of dentists accepting NHS patients and those taking on emergencies.”*

*“Keep ringing around, I'm sure you'll be able to get private appointment, but maybe not NHS.”*

## Private appointments

We wanted to find out whether practices would be able to offer a private appointment if they did not have an available NHS appointment.



### Pie Chart 11

Less than half of practices, **15 out of 31 (42%)** could offer a private appointment.



*“We are not taking any new patients at the moment, either NHS or private.”*



Five of the practices who could offer an appointment, could do so for between 3-7 days' time, with three offering a same day appointment. Our volunteer told us:

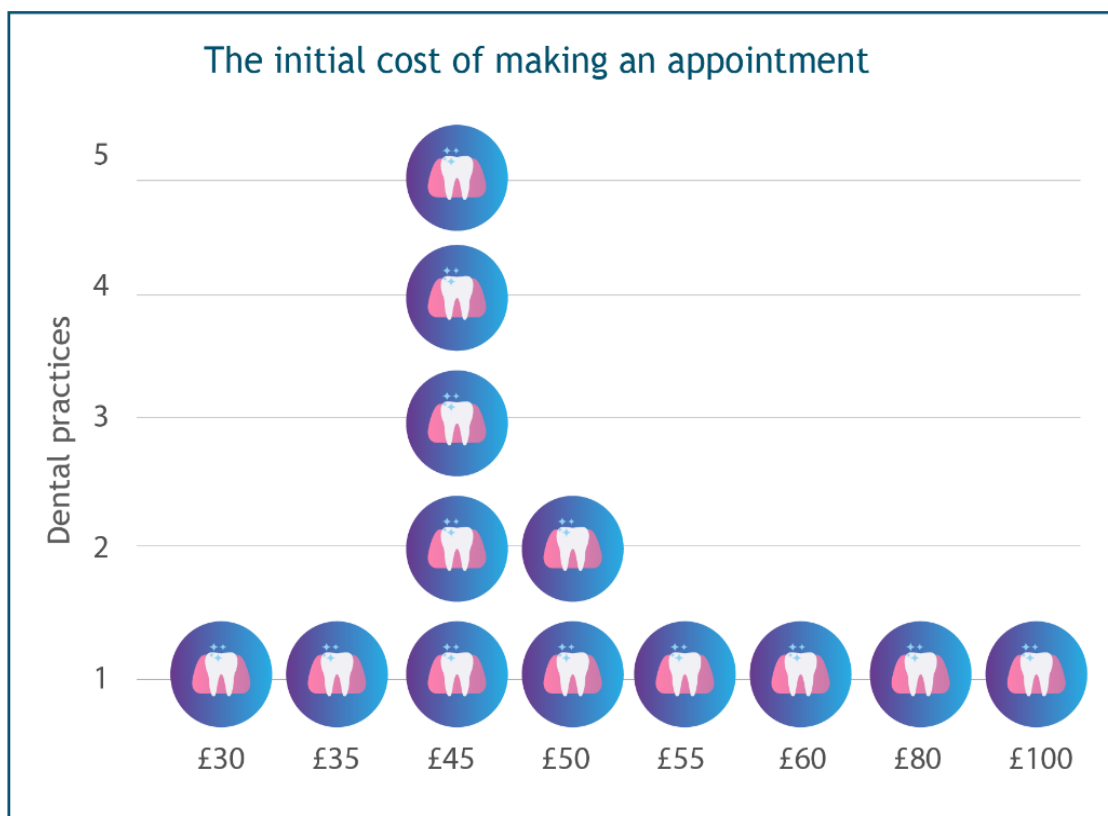


*“It would cost £45, and I would be seen today.”*

The remaining practices did not specify when an appointment might be available.

## Costs

All of the 13 practices who were able to offer a private appointment told us what the cost of the initial appointment would be, with five practices pointing out that there would be additional costs for treatment.



Graph 6

The cost of an initial appointment ranged from **£30** to **£100**, with nine practices offering an initial appointment for **£50** or less and the remaining four for more than this. Only two practices specified how much follow up treatment would be, telling us this would cost **£90**.



*“It will cost £55 for a consultation to assess what the problem is, plus the cost of the treatment.”*

## Comment

It is concerning that not all practices made it clear there might be an additional cost in addition to the initial appointment cost.

This could leave patients thinking that is the total cost they will have to pay. They may then book the appointment, not realising they could then be hit with a larger bill after treatment.

## Volunteer comments

Some of our volunteers commented on the conversations they had had with practice reception staff.

All of the comments were positive. Comments varied with two noting that the staff were “kind and helpful” and other comments showing the receptionist expressing support or compassion.



*“The receptionist told me she hoped I got out of pain.”*

## Comment

The initial findings from our first report in May 2021 indicated the majority of practices were seeing patients again. However, we are unsure whether practices are specifically concentrating on patients they would consider to be on their own practice list.

The findings from our Mystery Shopper exercise seem to show that patients who do not belong to a practice, cannot book an urgent or routine appointment.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Mystery Shopper scenario

You are ringing the dentist because you have toothache. You have had the pain for two days and it is getting worse. You are ringing to see if you can book an emergency NHS appointment. You have not been to this dentist before.

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