

To: All GDS Dentists

BY EMAIL

9 April 2020

Dear Colleague

Re: Arrangements to Enable Patients to Contact GDS Practices for Urgent Advice

Once again thank you for all of your help and support in making sure that across Northern Ireland patients are getting the dental care they need. I am particularly grateful to all of those involved in Urgent Dental Care (UDC) Centres which are now operating across all five Trust sites. Capacity in each site continues to increase as more dentists are fit tested for FFP3 masks and are available to staff the rotas.

The purpose of this letter is to clarify what cover is expected of GDS Dental Practices now, over the coming holiday period and beyond.

Last week, following on from queries raised by dentists, we advised GDS Dental Practices that between the hours of 9 am and 12 noon they should be contactable by patients to provide advice and to triage patients with urgent dental needs. This arrangement coincided with the opening of the Urgent Dental Care (UDC) Centres and was put in place to mitigate against these new centres being overwhelmed with referrals.

The five UDC Centres have now been opened and are being operated morning and afternoon sessions each day, seven days per week including bank holidays. The HSCB will pilot the operation of the UDC Centres over the initial few weeks, including the Easter holidays (Thursday 9 April 2020 to Tuesday 14 April 2020 inclusive). Likewise, during this period the UDC contact centre hub based at Dalrida Urgent Care (DUC) will be staffed by dental colleagues who will be contactable between 9:30-12:30 am and again between 1-4 pm each day. **The DUC service will only answer calls from GDPs** and will carry out additional triage and find the most suitable site and time slot for each patient. **The DUC service can be contacted at 028 2566 3510.**

In order to align the practice and DUC elements of this system and ensure that there is adequate advice to patients seeking urgent or emergency care, it is important that **during the period Thursday 9 April 2020 to Tuesday 14 April 2020 inclusive practices are contactable between the hours of 9 am to 4 pm.** By providing this cover, practices will not only provide the necessary first level triage support for the UDCs and DUC, but will also help prevent inappropriate contact by dental patients with General Medical Practitioners, Pharmacies and Hospital Emergency Departments who are under increasing pressure at this time. **On Wednesday 15 April 2020 onwards, practices should receive and manage patient calls from 9 am to 5 pm each day including Saturdays and Sundays.**

Dental Practices may wish to form local rotas or buddy up with another dental practice in order to give them the flexibility to provide the cover outlined above.

As per letter to you of 28 March 2020, patients with an urgent dental care need who do not meet the COVID-19 case definition may be seen in general dental practice for non-AGPs. I would ask you to keep the number of patients seen to an absolute minimum. Patients should come alone to the clinic and appointments should be timed/arranged so that there are no other patients in the waiting room. PPE and infection control guidance for dental care is monitored daily and you will be notified immediately should there be any change to advice. Please view the latest very comprehensive UK advice on

infection prevention and control of COVID-19 at the link below. Table 2 and the COVID-19: visual guide to safe PPE are particularly useful.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

I know that these are stressful times and that dentists have had to make dramatic changes to their professional and personal lives during the COVID-19 outbreak. By continuing to provide access for patients for advice and triage, you are not only supporting your colleagues in the UDC Centres, but also helping to keep pressure off other parts of the service such as Pharmacies, General Medical Practitioners and Hospital Emergency Departments. This support will be greatly appreciated by the wider HSC family.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Donaldson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a circular flourish at the end.

Michael Donaldson
Head of Dental Services / Acting Chief Dental Officer