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Dear Colleague

Specialist and community dentistry in Cornwall

Smile Together Dental C.I.C. is contracted through NHS England to provide specialist and community dental services to the population of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly through its West Country Dental Care service (WCDC). This service receives referrals for Special Care Adults and Children, which can include treatments involving sedation (both intravenous and inhalation) and Special Care conservation.

They also accept referrals for children's extractions under general anaesthetic, Minor Oral Surgery and Orthodontics, and provide Unscheduled Dental Care for the community.

For many years WCDC have been the sole NHS provider of these services in the county and have an excellent track record in patient care. As a social enterprise, they reinvest their profits into the local community and, year on year, treat twice as many patients as they are contracted to see.

However, this service receives many more referrals than they are both contracted to provide or able to treat and, as a result, waiting times for new referrals are high. This is especially true for initial assessment appointments. Recent departures and retirements have compounded this situation and WCDC have implemented a proactive recruitment campaign to attract experienced clinicians to work with the team here in the county.

There is a recognised challenge nationally in recruiting Specialists in Special Care dentistry and this applies equally if not more so in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Therefore, whilst WCDC's other services remains unchanged, the Special Care and Community service will necessarily be operating at a reduced level.

In the meantime we would therefore welcome your support with the following:

- Firstly, as a control measure to ensure WCDC are seeing the appropriate patient type, we are issuing the attached referral criteria to ensure only those referrals which are essential are accepted into their West Country Dental Care service – please note this referral criteria has been approved by both NHS England and the Local Dental Committee and will be managed centrally via the Referral Management Service as per all other referrals.
- Secondly, if you have or are referring patients into this service, please be aware that there will now be considerable longer waiting times for all assessments. We would highly recommend that you continue to see your patients on a regular basis and would ask that you ensure your patient is fully informed of the wait before you refer them on to the service
- Thirdly, we request that you try all possible treatment options before referring your patient into the service.


A particular area of concern is the number of referrals WCDC receive for treatment under inhalation sedation for children and intravenous sedation for phobic adults.

The demand for this service completely outstrips the available resources and as a result waiting times for these treatments are increasing. The priority of adult cases referred for IV sedation will currently be classed as low and waiting times for this treatment modality will increase.

If you have, within your practice, the skills and capacity to support patients in these areas, or indeed other potential solutions whilst we continue our efforts to recruit into the county's Special Care Service, please do contact the team at WCDC. Nicola Barr is the Clinical Director and Joy Callender the Head of Nursing and Quality – both can be contacted via 0333 405 0290 or email smiletogether@nhs.net.

Please be assured of our continued efforts to work on a solution with WCDC and we thank you in advance for your support. Should you need to contact us with any further queries you might have, please do not hesitate to do so.

Yours faithfully,



James Warren
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(Cornwall, IoS, Devon, Bristol, N.Somerset, Somerset, S.Glos)