



Patients with dental problems

Guidance - June 2019

GPs in London and across the country have declared a #GPstateofemergency. To help GPs and their practice teams to manage the increasing workload, Londonwide LMCs has produced some emergency guidance to manage requests for unresourced work and identify and communicate to patients activities that aren't covered by your core contract.

Patients often attend GP practices because they have a dental problem. GPs are not able to fully assess and treat dental problems.

Treating patients with dental problems is not a GP responsibility, even if a patient is not registered with a dentist because:

1. GPs are not trained to deal with dental issues, and
2. Dental treatment is not a contractual requirement.

If a patient presents with a toothache or other dental issue they should be advised to contact their local dentist or access 111 if their usual dental surgery is closed or they are not registered with a dentist.

The practice team should know of local in-hours and out-of-hours dental services that manage urgent and emergency dental conditions so that they can direct patients accordingly. This includes:

- NHS website
- NHS 111
- Local dental access centres
- Local NHS dentists

BMA guidance states that:

“GPs should not attempt to manage a condition requiring dental skills unless they have the appropriate training and expertise. Both the civil courts and the GMC require doctors to have appropriate skills for any treatment they offer.”





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If a GP chooses to treat a patient for dental problems they should be aware of their legal and contractual obligations.

If refusing to treat a patient for a dental issue, [BMA guidance \(March 2019\)](#) states:

- Before refusing to treat a patient asking for emergency dental treatment, a GP must ascertain that the condition requires only dental treatment. Primary care teams must put themselves in a position to judge the nature of the patient's condition by undertaking reasonable enquiries, and where appropriate a clinical assessment.
- Having established an apparent dental problem, GPs or practice teams should signpost to a dentist or local emergency service or if they feel necessary refer a patient to secondary care for any further assessment and treatment.
- Everyone in the practice team must do their best to ensure the patient doesn't need the attention of a GP when signposting.
- If the patient has no usual dentist, or there is no response from the usual dentist, the patient should contact the local NHS 111 service.
- Patients presenting with signs of spreading infection or systemic involvement of a dental infection should be referred immediately to secondary care for appropriate surgical management. Signs and symptoms of this may include, diffuse or severe facial swelling, trismus, dysphagia, fever or malaise.

