



**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
and Dental Service Provision in
Stockton-on-Tees**

December 2016

Introduction

Local Healthwatches have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs.
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to; Providers and Commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Rationale

During recent engagement activities, a number of individuals and professionals working within the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) have fed back concerns with the accessibility of, and care provided by the dentists for people diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Stockton-on-Tees.

Methodology

To gather further intelligence from local residents about this issue, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees designed a questionnaire and worked in partnership with other organisations including Daisy Chain and Stockton United For Change (SUFC) to distribute it and collect responses to find out if this was a wider problem. The questionnaire was also distributed online via the website, Facebook and Twitter pages. Please see Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire.

Results

A total of 30 questionnaires were completed containing a range of both positive and negative responses from individuals, family members and carers of registered patients at dental practices in Stockton-on-Tees.

How easy is it to make an appointment at the dentist?

Very easy	62%
Easy	7%
Relatively easy	21%
Difficult	3%
Very difficult	7%

90% of those who completed the questionnaire said that it was relatively easy, easy or very easy to make an appointments at the dentist they were registered with. Only 10% of patients said it was difficult or very difficult highlighting that this is not a common issue.

When you visit the dentist, do you feel all patient needs are considered?

A total of 85% of people who completed the questionnaire felt that all patient needs were considered when visiting the dentist. A number of individuals left comments some of which explained that a long waiting time can often be distressing for individuals with autism.

‘Made to wait 30 minutes in waiting room’

In addition to this, it is important for patients with autism to have a regular dentist who they can trust and become comfortable and familiar with to improve their overall experience of visiting the dentist. 43% of people who completed the questionnaire said that they specifically ask to see a preferred dentist for each appointment, 73% of whom said that their requests for a preferred dentist are met.

‘We have the same one all the time’

‘We see our named dentist but they change all the time’

A number of dentists in Stockton-on-Tees received praise from individuals who completed the questionnaire for their good quality of care for individuals with autism;

‘Always considerate and accommodating’

‘Excellent friendly dentist who takes his time and helps my child to relax’

‘They have always been calm and patient’

‘Very understanding staff’

‘The dentists and orthodontists have always been very helpful and supportive with regards to my son’s sensory issues relating to his mouth’

‘I am happy with the service we receive’

Suggestions for how visits to the dentist could be improved

Waiting room and distractions

Some individuals expressed that in order to ensure that all patient needs are met, they should be offered the use of a quiet room whilst waiting for their appointment or additionally distractions to help while waiting to be seen.

‘I have to ask for a quiet room’

‘Sensory room or quiet room’

‘A separate waiting room’

‘It should be highlighted on their computer system that a quiet area is required’

‘To actually have the TV switched on with programmes which would distract him’

Consistency with dentists

Individuals who completed the questionnaire stressed the importance of seeing the same dentist for each appointment. Some comments received found that frequent changes in different dentists and the uncertainty of not knowing who they are going to be seeing can be distressing for patients with Autism.

‘Dentist has changed about 6 times which is not ideal when a patient has Autism’

‘You go expecting to see one dentist only to find they have moved on’

Waiting times and changes to appointments

A number of individuals explained that they often find that there are long waiting times when visiting the dentist therefore reducing this was a suggestion made for improvement. In addition to this, it is important that the patients, family members and carers of individuals with Autism are kept informed about an expected waiting time, change of dentist or room.

‘Being informed when there is a waiting time’

‘Some appointments run very late’

‘Tell patient or carer how long the waiting time is’

‘If there is a change of room or dentist to let the parent know beforehand’

Wheelchair access

Wheelchair access was highlighted as an issue in two dental practices in Stockton-on-Tees. All dental practices should ensure that there are provisions to allow for patients who use wheelchairs to access the practice without difficulty.

‘Wheelchair access could be a problem’

‘There are no wheelchair facilities at my dentist’

Additional Feedback

Additional comments were received with regards to suggested improvements to dental practices;

‘I would like his teeth checked more but understand how difficult it is’

‘More of a thorough check of teeth’

‘Referred to special needs dentist’

‘More awareness leaflets about sensory issues’

‘Appointments not being cancelled’

Conclusion

The majority of feedback received found that individuals with Autism, their family members and carers are happy with the service they receive from their dental practice in Stockton-on-Tees. It was found that access to and availability of appointments was usually good and that generally all patient needs were met. Some suggestions made for improvement included reducing the length of waiting times, offer a quiet room and distractions whilst waiting to be seen, keep patients and family members informed of any changes, make sure all practices are wheelchair accessible and to ensure the patients have a regular dentist for each appointment.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank Daisy Chain and Stockton United For Change (SUFC) for assisting in distributing the questionnaire. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would also like to thank all of the individuals, family members and carers who completed the questionnaire and shared their views and experiences.

Appendix



Dental Service Provision Survey

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are working in partnership with Stockton United For Change (SUFC) and Daisy Chain to have your voices heard regarding dental service provision you access either for yourself, a family member or someone you care for. This information will be collated and form the basis of a proposed work plan which will target services you tell us need improving. The information gathered is anonymised and we value any views and experiences you have of health and social care services, we have included space at the end of the survey for you to share any additional information that you would like to provide.

1. Who are you completing this survey on behalf of?

- Yourself
- A family member (please specify below)
- Someone you care for (please specify below)

Specify here

2. Is the individual concerned registered with a local dental service?

- Yes
- No

If no, please explain why below

3. Please state the name of the dental practice below

4. Please state the address and/or postcode of dental practice below

5. How easy is it to make an appointment at this dentist?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Relatively easy
- Difficult
- Very difficult

6. When you visit the dentist do you feel all patient needs are considered?

- Yes
- No

Please tell us more below

7. Do you ask to see a preferred dentist?

(If you answered no, please skip the next question)

- Yes
- No

8. Are the preferences for the preferred dentist met?

- Yes
- No

If not, please tell us more below

9. Do you have any suggestions for how visits to this dentist could be improved?

10. We welcome your feedback on any other publicly funded health and social care services you have accessed, such as your GP practice, hospital, care home, pharmacy or social services etc.

(*Please also give us the name of the provider if sharing your views e.g. Elm Tree Surgery/North Tees Hospital/Stockton Social Services)

If you would like any further information regarding the services involved in this survey, please find the contact details for each service below:

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees

Address: Catalyst House, 27 Yarm Road, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3NJ

Telephone: 01642 688312

Email: healthwatchstockton@pcp.uk.net

Website: www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk

Stockton United For Change (SUFC)

Address: c/o Newtown Community Resource Centre, Durham Road, Stockton-On-Tees, TS19 0DE

Telephone: 07935 447375

Email: info@stocktonunitedforchange.co.uk

Website: <http://www.stocktonunitedforchange.co.uk>

Daisy Chain

Address: Calf Fallow Farm, Calf Fallow Lane, Norton, Stockton-On-Tees, TS20 1PF

Telephone: 01642 531248

Email: info@daisychainproject.co.uk

Website: <http://www.daisychainproject.co.uk>

If you would like to receive updates regarding this survey, please specify your preferred method of contact and provide contact details below:

11. If you would like to receive updates regarding this survey, please specify your preferred method of contact and provide contact details below:

Post

Email

12. Please provide address and email address details below: