



Ein cyf/Our ref VG/04075/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair,
Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament

7 July 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your email of 15 June regarding the petition P-05-977 to re-open full general dental services in Wales in line with dental practices in England.

Following the announcement in England that dental practices would be open for the first time from 8 June there has been significant interest in dentistry and the resulting media coverage has not fully conveyed the accurate position regarding dental services in Wales.

Unlike in England, throughout this pandemic, dentists in Wales have been 'open' and able to see patients face to face in their practices when necessary for urgent care although routine non-urgent dentistry is not being provided for the time being. Like all other countries in the UK we also established 15 urgent dental centres to treat emergency and urgent cases requiring more complex treatment.

I do not accept the notion that Wales is somehow lagging behind England in the reopening of services. During the pandemic dentists and their teams have seen more than 16,000 people in practice and provided over 175,000 consultations remotely, via phone or video services. In addition the urgent dental centres have provided treatment to some 7,000 people.

It is a priority that our plan for the reinstatement of services must be cautious and gradual in line with the Welsh Government's approach to easing lockdown. We do not take a lead from England, with our position in Wales being one of implementing a safe, phased, risk-based re-establishment of dental services. There is a need to balance the oral health needs of patients against the requirement that we must continue to consider the wider context of Covid-19 to reduce the risk of community transmission in order to protect patients, dental teams and the wider community.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

On 22 May the Chief Dental Officer of Wales published the De-escalation Plan for Dentistry which set out a phased re-establishment of dental services to meet population needs. On 10 June we then published the All-Wales Standard Operating Process (SOP) which was issued to all dental practices as part of the recovery plan for dentistry in Wales. This set out the resumption of dental services with plans for the first phase of de-escalation coming into effect from 1 July when more dental practices in Wales would be able to start to introduce additional treatments and a wider range of care.

All along our plans for the restoration of dental services have been kept under review to ensure that dentistry is allied with the recovery plans for other areas of primary care and wider services.

Aligned with the First Minister's announcement on 19 June on the further easing of lockdown measures, we lifted the Red alert in dentistry in Wales from Monday 22 June. Dental services can now move to the Amber phase of de-escalation. The majority of practices and health boards are likely to still need and want the time available before 1 July to prepare, and we fully support that requirement. However, dental practices who are ready to do so can open more fully and relax the criteria for urgent care assessment, to see and treat more of their patients ahead of the earlier planned date of 1 July.

The timing of the stages will continue to be kept under review. The return of services will be gradual and we have acknowledged capacity for dental care in some practices will be limited by physical measures and the availability of appropriate PPE (and fit testing). We need dental practices to continue to follow strict infection control measures, including social distancing, to protect practice staff, patients and the wider community. The approach we are taking proposes to deliver dental services for those most in need, with the treatments provided increasing as the Covid-19 risk reduces.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vaughan Gething AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services