

LANARKSHIRE OUT-OF-HOURS EMERGENCY DENTAL SERVICE

Aim

The aim of this paper is to provide the Board with the first Annual Report of the out-of-hours emergency dental service.

Background

General dental practitioners (GDPs) provide most of the primary care dental treatment in Lanarkshire and in addition the community dental service (CDS) cares for a variety of patient groups who cannot for one reason or another be treated in general practice.

Since the revision of the general dental service contract in the early 1990s, GDPs have been required to provide appropriate out-of-hours dental services to their registered patients. In Lanarkshire most but not all GDPs joined one of three large rotas developed for this purpose with the remainder making other arrangements. Dentists working in the CDS did not have the same formal obligation but developed a weekend service to meet their ethical responsibility as set out by the General Dental Council.

Whilst patients registered with GDPs and those attending the CDS could access an out-of-hours service, unregistered patients had no formal provision and relied on goodwill arrangements. Consequently at any one time approximately 250,000 Lanarkshire residents, because they were not registered with a dentist, had no formal access to an emergency dental service.

Policy context

The Scottish Executive Health Department provided guidance in November 2003, which not only clarified the definition of an emergency, but set out some standards for target response times. In 2005 the Dental Action Plan set the target that there should be an integrated NHS 24/NHS Board system for out-of-hours/emergency care in place by 2006.

The new integrated system

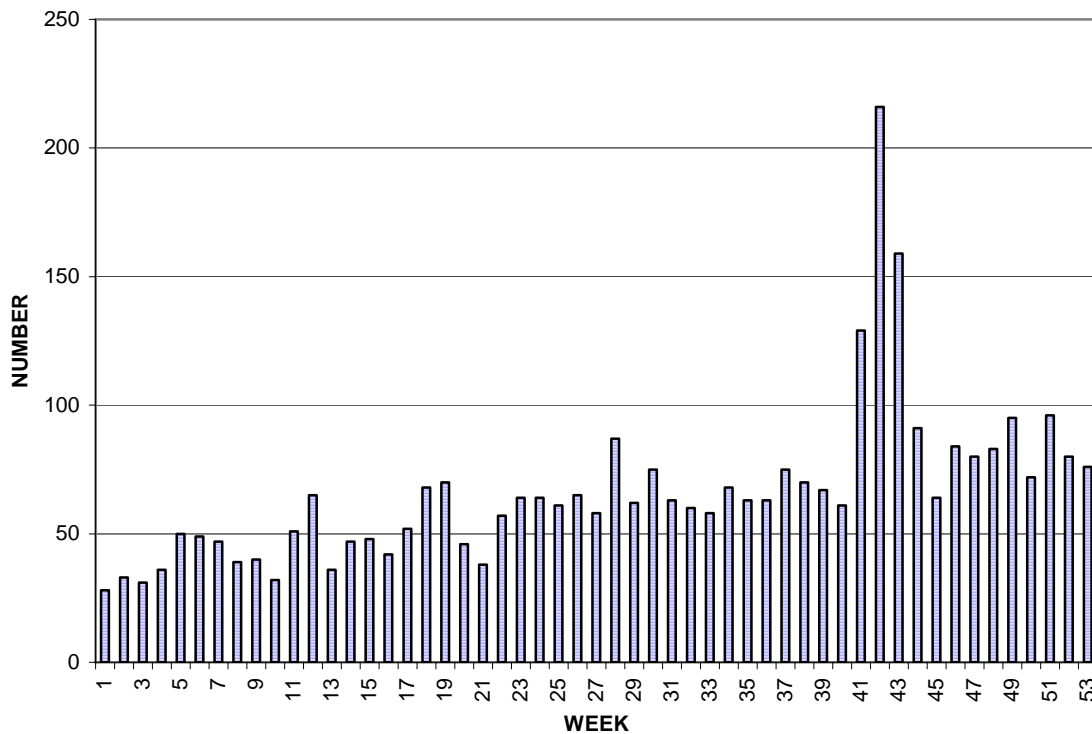
After discussion at the Area Dental Committee and following wide consultation with the profession locally, the new system, managed by the CDS, became operational in March 2006. It was recognised that a single system providing a service for participating GDPs' patients, as well as those of the CDS and unregistered people, would be the best model and would have three fundamental constituents.

1. A triage service operated by NHS 24 but employing dental nurses at peak times.

This aspect of the service is based at Hairmyres Hospital and during the first year of operation, a total of 3,514 calls were handled by dental triage nurses, (*Figure 1*) this averaged 66 calls per week but with an obvious increase over the festive period (weeks 41-43); 62% of calls were made at weekends. As the service developed, provision for dental triage nursing was increased and since October there have been

two dental triage nurses on duty at peak times on Saturdays and Sundays. Of the patients who called triage, 2,189 (62%) were given an appointment for treatment either at Wishaw General Hospital or, if required during the week at a local practice and the remainder were given advice, e.g. reassurance, pain management. This trend of 4 out of 10 calls for patients not requiring an appointment continues.

Figure 1 - Calls triaged

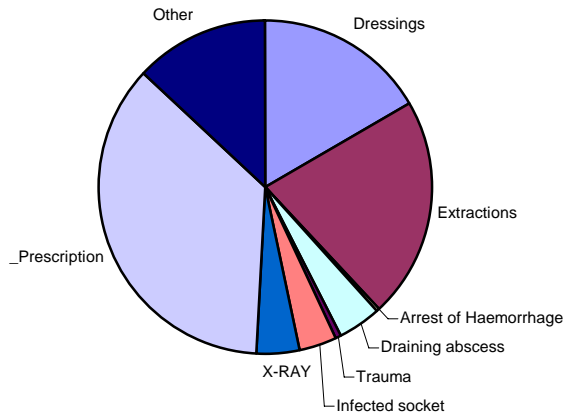


2. A weekend and public holiday service, to which patients could be referred by NHS 24

This service operates from Wishaw General Hospital and currently the rota is made up of 83 dentists and 22 nurses, of the latter some also work as the dental triage nurses. A total of 1,667 patients were given an appointment for the weekend clinic where a variety of procedures were carried out (*Figure 2*). The most common treatments were extractions or dressings and the provision of prescriptions, usually antibiotics. Other treatments included draining abscesses, arresting haemorrhage and attending to infected sockets and to the consequences of trauma.

Over the period, 35 patients (2%) were given an appointment with Accident and Emergency and a total of 297 patients (14% of those given an appointment) failed to attend.

Figure 2 - Procedures carried out at the out of hours emergency dental clinic



The patients who attended the weekend service came from across Lanarkshire (Figure 3) and most were aged between 21 and 50 (Figure 4). Of the patients who attended, 46% reported that they were registered with a dentist.

Figure 3 - Patient attendance by locality of residence

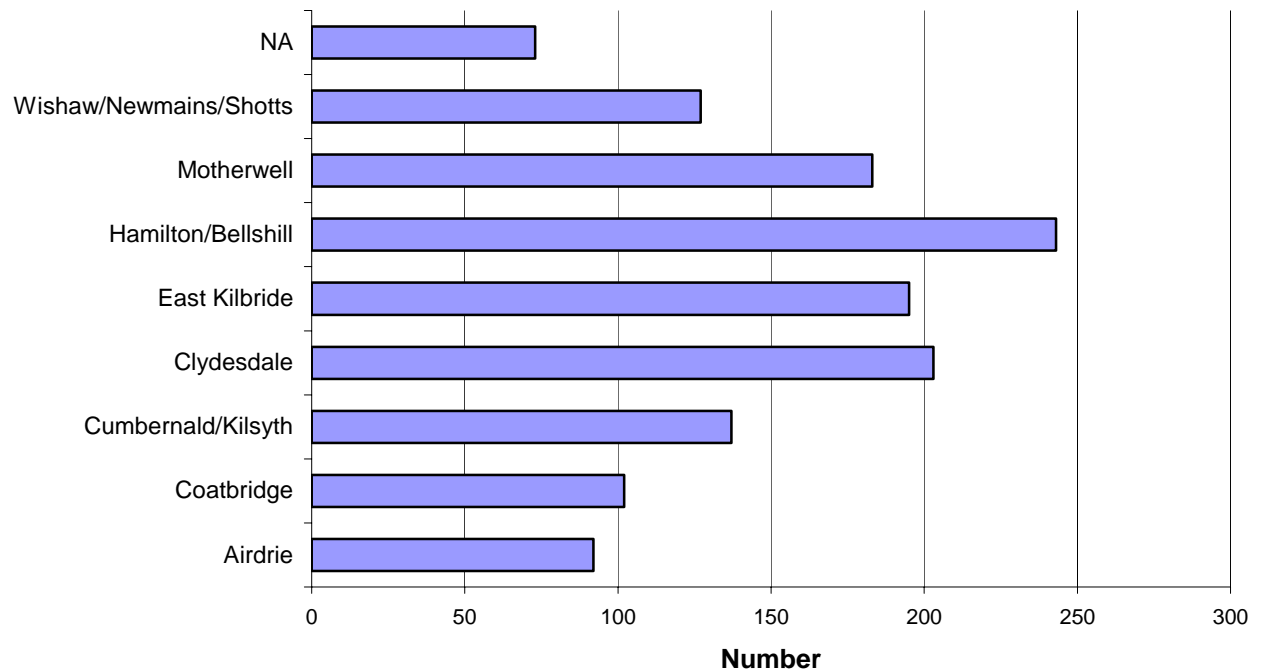
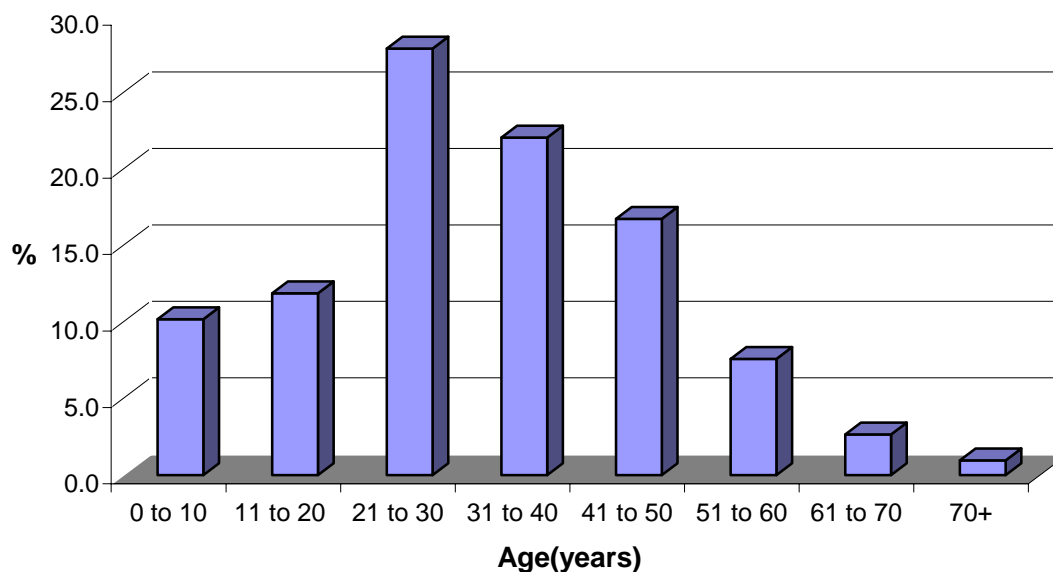


Figure 4: Attendance by age group



3. A weekday service provided by a rota of local practitioners

Each day 7 dentists are available in their own practice to each see up to 3 unregistered patients for next day care on referral from NHS 24. As a result the capacity for weekday next day appointments over the period was 5,565, of which 487 were needed for appointing patients thus working on average at 8.8% capacity.

Funding

Funding for the service comes from two sources: the primary care non-discretionary allocation and a separate allocation specifically for the emergency dental service. Patients are charged the usual fees for NHS treatment and the service generated an income of £19,758, of which just over £4,000 was from patient contributions.

Summary

The out-of-hours emergency dental service staffed by local dental practitioners and dental nurses was successfully introduced and has provided a comprehensive service for the people of Lanarkshire.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to note the first Annual Report.

Mike Devine
Director Primary Care
Salaried Dental Service

Margie Taylor
Consultant in Dental
Public Health

Kieran Watters
Dental Practice Advisor

March 2007