

27 March 2008

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SECRETARIAT

Dear Ms McCartney

**Teething problems – a review of NHS dental care in London**

Thank you for sending me a copy of your report on dental care in London. As you say, we believe that the major problem in London is not availability of care but uptake.

I know that many PCTs in London are now actively seeking to improve the uptake of services in areas where the need is high and services are available but uptake is low.

There has been much talk about confusion about the cost of treatment and indeed one of the main aims of the new charge system was to provide clarity for patients.

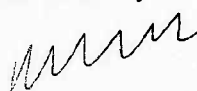
Under the old system, there were over 400 charges for individual items of service, and it was clear that many people did not understand the NHS charges. The new system is clear with only three NHS charges. It is inevitable when moving to an averaging system that some people will pay slightly more than under the old system and some people will pay slightly less.

One thing is clear, and that is that NHS dental treatment does not carry the same financial burden as private dentistry with some of the "monthly instalment payment plans" being more than 10 times more expensive than NHS dental treatment.

We reduced the maximum charge for NHS dental treatment from nearly £400 to under £200. It appears to us that much of the confusion is created by the private sector who may wish to conceal how expensive private dentistry is by creating confusion around NHS charges.

We accept that provision across London is not evenly spread and obviously, patients in some areas may have to travel a little further to access NHS dental treatment, but we agree with your primary finding that London is well served by NHS dentistry. We have increased the funding of NHS dentistry by 11% from April 2008, and we will be working with the NHS to ensure that this leads to improved access to NHS dental services. Plainly, in London, this will involve alerting people to services which are already available, as well as commissioning new service capacity.

Yours sincerely



**Barry Cockcroft**  
Chief Dental Officer - England  
Directorate of Commissioning & Systems Management

