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Dear Patient

GPs and dental problems

GP contracts are to provide primary *medical* services and therefore any treatment for dental problems is by definition excluded; furthermore GPs will be aware of their professional obligations under GMC's Good Medical Practice Guidance always to practice within their competence and to refer whenever appropriate. Patients seeking consultations for dental conditions therefore should be robustly advised to seek appropriate treatment from a dental practitioner.

Toothache and Dental Abscess

Toothache may result from many different causes including a dental abscess is due to inflammation and development of pus in the restricted space within or around the tooth. The correct treatment is to identify the source of pain, and if infection drain away the pus. First aid treatment is to take ibuprofen and cooling drinks to relieve the pain. If the pain lasts for more than 1-2 days the patient should consult with a dentist. Use of antibiotics is not advised without first seeing a dentist. Inappropriate use of antibiotics can mask the site of the infection making identification of the offending tooth difficult. Patients seeking consultations in general practice for dental pain should be advised to see a primary care dentist as soon as possible. If a patient does consult at the surgery for dental pain then the GP should advise on first aid treatment and again signpost patients to see a primary care dentist as soon as possible.

Referrals to the Dental Hospital

Patients sometimes present to GPs with lesions in the mouth, TMJ pain or other oral problems for which a GP might consider a secondary care referral. Referrals to the Birmingham Dental Hospital now requires completion of a referral template, and if inappropriate may be rejected back to the referring clinician. It may often be more appropriate to refer such patients to a dentist within primary care in the first instance. After further assessment the dentist will refer on to secondary care if appropriate. Clearly the decision on whether to refer directly to secondary care or to a primary care dental practitioner will be a matter for the GPs' clinical judgement.

Finding a dentist

Patients should be advised that they can find details of local dentists taking NHS patients by entering their postcode on the NHS Choices website or phoning NHS 111.

Kind regards

Yours faithfully

Davenal House Surgery Partnership