

New powers for dental and pharmacy staff to free up appointments

On 28 March 2024, Primary Care Minister Andrea Leadsom announced that patients will have faster, simpler and fairer access to primary care as the government gives new powers to pharmacy technicians, dental hygienists and dental therapists to supply and administer medicines.

The move follows two public consultations run by the government, which found widespread support for giving new powers to these staff to cut bureaucracy and support more efficient patient care.

Dental hygienists and dental therapists will be able to give patients certain types of medicines – including pain relief and fluoride – without sign off from a dentist.

The move will also free up dentists' time, allowing them to deliver more patient-facing clinical services and improving access to primary care services for patients.

The announcement in March was part of the latest series of measures the government has brought forward to cut waiting lists and improve access to primary care, which includes the publication of the dental recovery plan, which aims to free up 2.5 million more appointments this year.

There are currently 9,733 dental hygienists and 6,198 dental therapists currently registered with the General Dental Council in the UK.

Primary Care Minister Andrea Leadsom said: 'We want to give patients faster, simpler and fairer access to the care they need, when they need it – and giving these powers to pharmacy technicians, dental therapists and hygienists will do just that.'

'Today's announcement shows we are continuing to deliver on our promises made to improve access to primary care for all, building on the government's long term ambitions, including through the dental recovery plan [...].'

'We want to ensure our fantastic staff are recognised for the vital work that they do, working to their full scope of practice and delivering for everyone who walks through their doors.'

Miranda Steeples, President of the British Society of Dental

Hygiene and Therapy, said: 'BSDHT welcomes plans to enable our professions to work to the full extent of their skillset and give them new powers that enable them to offer patients the care they need.'

'Everyone will benefit from an oral healthcare team that runs more smoothly and uses its time effectively.'

The public consultations ran in 2023 and received overwhelming support, with 97% of respondents agreeing that dental hygienists and therapists should be given new powers. Respondents commenting on both sets of proposals included members of the public, NHS and health service delivery bodies, and private and not-for-profit organisations.

The changes fall under the government and NHS's primary care recovery plan, which sets out the vision to ensure the NHS can deliver at the very maximum of its capability, utilising all its professional staff and contractors, including in pharmacies and dental practices.

Dental therapists and hygienists are currently able to administer medicines, including local anaesthetic and high-strength fluoride, but they need a prescription from a dentist. This means breaking from the patient and interrupting the dentist's own work to get the prescription signed. The proposed exemptions will enable dental therapists and hygienists to supply or administer specific medicines on their own authority, making the process more efficient for patients and practices.

Dr Fiona Sandom, Chair of the British Association of Dental Therapists, said: 'The British Association of Dental Therapists is delighted that dental therapists and dental hygienists will soon be able to supply and administer certain prescription only medicines to patients without a need for a patient specific direction (PSD) or a patient group direction (PGD).'

'This will allow dental therapists and dental hygienists to use their full scope of practice and deliver the care they have been trained and educated to deliver.'

As outlined in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, the specified aim is to deliver 15% of dental activity through dental therapists and dental hygienists, as opposed to the current estimate of 5%.



UEA proposes training places to provide more dentists and doctors for the East

On 10 April the University of East Anglia (UEA) announced a new and innovative route to fast-track qualified doctors into jobs in the region and beyond, with the launch of a new Graduate Entry Medical course.

The new four-year course is one year faster than a standard medical degree course, without compromising on quality. It will be available to applicants from September 2025 and was announced at an event hosted by UEA focusing on tackling health inequalities, which featured speeches from Government Health Minister, Dame Andrea Leadsom MP; Jerome Mayhew, MP for Broadland; and

the new Chief Executive of the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, Prof Lesley Dwyer.

UEA Vice-Chancellor Prof David Maguire said: 'UEA is concerned about health inequalities across the eastern region and, in our 60th anniversary year, we think it is important to invest in providing more teaching opportunities for health professionals to improve people's access to future NHS services. The course will equip newly qualified doctors with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle health inequalities across the east of England, particularly those associated with rural and coastal areas.'



« The announcement of the course was made at the ‘Tackling Health Inequalities in the East of England’ event, in which Dame Andrea Leadsom MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health, Start for Life and Primary Care gave the keynote speech.

At the event, Prof Maguire also reaffirmed UEA’s commitment to the University’s proposal to provide a Norwich dental school for the Eastern region.

East Anglia is the only region of England that does not have a dental school and consequently the region struggles to recruit and retain dentists, making it the most underserved area in the UK for dental care. According to recent data from the Local Government Association, Norfolk and Waveney has one of the lowest numbers of dentists per 10,000 people in the country.

Prof Maguire said: ‘Parts of East Anglia are among the worst “dental deserts” in the country, and to provide the next generation of dentists for our region, UEA is proposing a new dental school.

‘We welcome the Government’s plan to increase the number of undergraduate dental training places. In considering the establishment of new dental schools in underserved areas, we are asking the Government to allocate the new dentistry undergraduate places to East Anglia, where a new dental school can have the greatest impact.’



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The Graduate Entry Medical course will be held in the University’s Norwich Medical School, with medical students on the course based at Norwich Research Park and given unique access to the state-of-the-art facilities at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH).

The students will also benefit from the immersive teaching spaces, improved preparation areas, and high-tech teaching facilities in the new Anatomy Suite, which is set to open in April 2025 in the Queen’s Building on UEA campus.

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Dr Nancy Yousef

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