

Dental update for HOSP - 7 November 2024

Southampton City Council Public Health Team, NHSE Workforce Training and Education, and NHSE Dental Public Health

Dental Inequalities

The association between poor health, including poor oral health, and inequalities is well-known. It is an NHSE and system priority to shift from treatment to prevention and support everyone to live healthier lives. Good oral care habits, including healthy diet and toothbrushing, when young can reduce the risk of pain, sleepless nights, speech development and socialisation. This will also reduce the need for treatment, whether in primary care or hospital admission for general anaesthesia extractions which may result in loss of school days and children achieving their full potential.

Southampton City Council works with various partners to integrate oral health into wider health improvement programmes. Some of these are highlighted below.

Local initiatives for children and young people

Southampton City Council commissions an Oral Health Promotion Service to improve oral health and reduce the rates of dental decay in children. The service focusses on children under 5 years living in the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

The Oral Health Promotion service coordinates, facilitates, supports and provides a range of evidence-based interventions, following the principles of [Delivering Better Oral Health](#) to improve the oral health and reduce oral health inequalities in the target population. This includes supervised toothbrushing and parental information, to increase the use of fluoride toothpaste, and through leading the delivery of the Oral Health strand of the [Healthy Early Years Award](#) (HEYA).

HEYA offers early years settings the opportunity to work towards a quality assured programme, helping to improve health and wellbeing for young children. The Oral Health strand of HEYA dovetails with the Healthy Eating strand, so once early years settings have achieved their Healthy Eating bronze award, they can choose to move onto the Silver Healthy Mouth award. This reinforces healthy eating policies, encourages the identification of oral health champions and provides information to establish a supervised toothbrushing scheme.

The Oral Health Promotion service also supports the wider health and social care workforce (Health Visitors, Early Help Practitioners, Public Health Nursing and Family Nurse Practitioners) through providing training to embed the principles of good oral health within existing services.

In spring 2024, Southampton City Council facilitated a collaboration between Saints Foundation and the NHS England Workforce Training and Education (NHSE WT&E) Dental Directorate. The Dental Directorate facilitated Hampshire based dentists undertaking their foundation training to contribute to Saints Foundation's outreach into schools. The foundation dentists provided education sessions promoting good oral health alongside the Saints Foundation's Champions. The sessions were designed to tie into the Saints Foundation Healthy Lifestyles Programme and engaged 8 schools targeting areas where school absence had been linked to toothache, with a total of 58 young people taking part. It was supported by providing the Champions with information and resources including which

NHS Dental practices were currently accepting dental patients so that they could give advice to the wider school community as well as the young people they supported.

The foundation dentists gained insight into difficulties with behaviour change for this group and how to get the best outcomes by focusing on simple messaging and making content engaging. One reflected:

'Moreover, this experience deepened my understanding of the broader societal impact of preventive dental care. By reaching out to young students and instilling good oral hygiene habits early on, we have the opportunity to positively influence their lifelong dental health. This perspective shift underscores the importance of community outreach initiatives and the role of dentists as educators beyond the confines of the clinic. Moving forward, I am committed to applying the lessons learned from this experience in my practice. I will strive to enhance my communication skills to better serve and educate individuals about oral health.'

Dental workforce training and development

NHSE WT&E is responsible for educating and training the health workforce in England. This includes developing a multi-professional primary dental care workforce able to meet the needs of current and future service requirements. NHSE WT&E Dental Directorate are committed to providing training opportunities and career development. Oral health improvement is important and developing a workforce to deliver programmes is vital. The oral health practitioner apprenticeship has been developed for dental nurses wishing to enhance their skills and gain a formal qualification in oral health education and promotion. This gives valuable career progression which aids retention. It is designed to support dental practices in delivering enhanced oral health promotion in the community they serve e.g. to early years groups, ante-natal groups, care home staff. This apprenticeship also provides an opportunity for skills in health screening. NHSE WT&E Dental Directorate are currently in talks with Hampshire College Group about highlighting careers in oral health, signposting to their dental nurse apprenticeship and developing the oral health apprenticeship.