

Submission
No 174

INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

Organisation:

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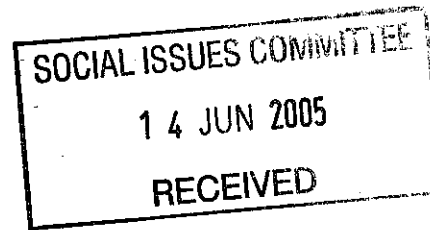
Date Received: 14/06/2005

Theme:

Summary

The Chairman,
The Inquiry into Dental Services,
The Standing Committee on Social Issues,
Legislative Council,
Parliament House,
Macquarie St,
SYDNEY NSW 2000.

7th June 2005



Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a senior dentist currently employed at Blacktown, Mt Druitt and Westmead Hospitals in western Sydney.

I am concerned that in this area patients are having to wait 3 – 4 years for basic dental treatment. Even people in pain often have to wait several weeks for an emergency appointment.

The demand for dental services is so high in this area that we have 2 levels of waiting lists that virtually all patients have to go through. I believe that in other parts of the State patients may only need to go on one list before definitive treatment can be offered; waiting times depend on resource allocation for the particular area.

First contact with the Dental Service in my area is usually through the Oral Health Call Centre. A series of questions is asked by the operator and on the basis of the patient's answers a priority code is allocated. This will determine how soon the patient will be offered an appointment either for emergency treatment (if required), or for an assessment by a dentist of their treatment needs if they are not in need of emergency care.

Assessment List

Non-emergency patients are allocated a priority by the Call Centre for Assessment. The waiting time depends on the priority, but is usually of the order of a year or more.

Treatment List

After coming off the Assessment waiting list, the patient is again allocated a priority code, this time by the examining dentist. If he/she has a very serious medical condition (eg about to have a transplant, undergoing chemotherapy etc) he/she will receive an appointment quite quickly.

Those who do not have a very serious medical condition wait on the Treatment waiting list for several years. This includes patients with missing front teeth or chronic illnesses like diabetes.

Detailed figures on waiting times and numbers in Western Sydney can be obtained from:

The General Manager,
Oral Health, Sydney West Area Health Service.
Centre for Oral Health,
Westmead Hospital.

I believe the excessive waiting times in Western Sydney are the inevitable result of inadequate staff numbers to carry out the treatment required. An analogy would be a blockage in a river causing a log-jam. The lack of staff is due to both:

1. Inadequate funding to employ sufficient numbers of clinical and support staff
2. Poor remuneration particularly for experienced dentists, making it almost impossible now to recruit them. The junior dentists who now make up the bulk of our staff have not yet reached the level of speed and expertise that comes with practice, or the knowledge and experience to select the most appropriate treatment plan for their patients.

I am most grateful to have the opportunity to submit to your inquiry, and apologise for the lateness of my submission.

Yours faithfully,



(Margaret Vautin)