Introduction

NHS Digital regularly publish information on NHS dentistry in England at a national and local level. These publications include facts and figures on the number of people who see an NHS dentist, the volume and type of treatment they receive and the number of NHS dentists. These reports are used by national policy makers to help develop future dental policy and by local NHS managers to help design local dental services.

Relevance

This publication allows commissioners and policy makers to monitor levels of service delivery to target groups, highlighting changes over time. It provides information to the Department of Health and Social Care and local NHS managers, allowing for monitoring of the provision of dental services and dental expenditure, and helping to inform planning.

The quarterly publications include information on activity and patients seen. The activity data monitors levels of activity across treatment bands, highlighting changes in practice over time. The key use of the patients seen data is to monitor the effectiveness of the current dental contract.

The annual publication includes the data above along with summary orthodontic data, clinical treatment data and information on patient charges. It also includes dental workforce statistics.

Accuracy and reliability

Provisional activity data are published in the first three quarterly publications. This is adjusted to provide the estimated final position for national data. Adjustment methodology and factors are published in the guide to dental publications that accompanies the report.

- final activity data are published in the annual report
- patients seen data are all final data and are published in the quarterly and annual reports
- final data on orthodontics, clinical treatment and patient charges are published in the annual report
- figures for patient charges may be slightly lower than expected as information is not collected from closed contracts, although the volume of these is limited.
Timeliness and punctuality

This publication is classed as Official Statistics and the publication date was pre-announced. There was no gap between the planned and actual publication date.

- activity data are published four and a half months after the end of the relevant period
- patients seen data are published one and a half months after the end of the relevant period.
- patient charges, orthodontics and clinical data are published four and a half months after the end of the year.

Accessibility and clarity

This publication combines data in table format, commentary and supporting information. The data are freely available via the NHS Digital website.

Additional information is provided in Excel format at sub-national level, including csv files which are suitable for further analysis.

Coherence and comparability

The activity, patients seen and patient charges data covers the period of the current dental contract (introduced in 2006 and revised in 2012) and are not comparable with other previous contracts. The methodologies are consistent with those used by the Welsh Assembly Government. Information was first published in 2008-09 on orthodontic activity. Orthodontic patients are included in the patients seen measure.

The clinical data are a national time series which began in 2008-09. This data is not comparable with clinical data from the previous contract. Prior to 2011-12, the dental statistics were published as ‘Experimental Statistics’.

In April 2018 two practices moved CCG. In addition, several CCGs merged reducing the total number from 207 to 195 and the South of England region split into South East of England and South West of England regions. Consequently, some data may not be comparable to previous quarters, but England level data will not be affected.

Data for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 was under-reported due to known data quality issues resulting from a change in the FP10 form (advanced mandatory services). These issues are being rectified and data will be published in due course. Consequently, data for the four years highlighted are not comparable with other years.

Trade-offs between output quality components

The data are published as soon after year end as possible. Time is allowed for analysing and producing the report without impacting on the timeliness of the data.
Assessment of user needs and perceptions

During each publication cycle data quality is assessed by the collection team and the publications team, and where queries arise, data suppliers are contacted to validate and confirm data submissions. Comments can be received through various media modes:

email: enquires@nhsdigital.nhs.net
telephone: 0300 303 5678

All NHS Digital publications encourage on line feedback via a ‘Live Chat’ link on the right of web page. This feedback is used to help assess users’ needs and whether this report meets them.

Performance, cost and respondent burden

This data is collected by NHS Dental Services. The majority of the information is collected electronically and data are made available to us for publication as a by-product of these processes. The current contract is designed to simplify data collection requirements.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

The data contained in this publication are Official Statistics. The code of practice is adhered to from collecting the data to publishing: http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf

All publications are subject to a standard NHS Digital risk assessment prior to issue. Disclosure control is implemented where judged necessary.

For more detailed descriptions of datasets used in the NHS Digital dental publications see the beginners guide to dental data at: http://digital.nhs.uk/pubs/dentalq31718

Please see links below to the relevant NHS Digital policies.

Statistical Governance Policy:
https://digital.nhs.uk/binaries/content/assets/legacy/pdf/0/q/statistical_governance_policy.pdf

Freedom of Information:
https://digital.nhs.uk/article/253/Freedom-of-Information