

## **Special Care Dentistry**

### ***What is Special Care Dentistry?***

Special Care Dentistry (SCD) is the term used to describe the oral health care requirements and delivery of treatment for people with impairment, disability and/or complex medical conditions. It is concerned with the improvement of oral health of individuals and groups in society who have a physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, medical, emotional or social impairment or disability (or, more often, a combination of a number of these factors). It covers a diverse client-group with a range of disabilities and complex additional needs including people living at home, in long stay residential care and secure units, as well as homeless people.

### ***Why is there such a thing as Special Care Dentistry?***

Disability is common and will touch the lives of one in four of us. People with disabilities and complex additional needs should have equal access to oral health care services and equitable oral health outcomes. Currently this is not the case and, although people with disability (particularly those with learning disability or mental health problems) have similar patterns of oral disease to the general population, the evidence is that they have poorer oral health and poorer health outcomes from care.

Current health and social policy is directed towards reducing health inequalities through better co-ordinated activity that crosses traditional boundaries so that agencies work in partnership to improve quality of life and access to health services. The ethos of SCD has always echoed this philosophy, and it is defined through its broad-based, cross-agency, partnership approach to working with other health care professionals, carers, and social services.

### ***Are there specialists in Special Care Dentistry?***

In December 2005, The General Dental Council approved, in principle, the development of a Specialty in Special Care Dentistry. In time, this will lead to a register or specialist list of dentists who are experts in providing oral care for people with disability. It will also lead to the development of a training pathway so that future dentists who wish to specialise in SCD can have a formal training.

It will take some time before the Specialist list, development of the criteria for already experienced dentists to gain entry onto the list, and the new training pathway are developed.

### ***In the meantime, where can someone who needs Special Care Dentistry find an experienced dentist?***

Many of the dentists who are most experienced in SCD work in the salaried dental services (either the Community Dental Service or the Personal Dental Service). Your local Primary Care Trust (PCT) should be able to provide you with their contact details. There are also some high street dentists who are experienced in providing SCD. However, the PCTs do not hold a list of these people. They do usually have a list of practices that are easily accessible to people who use wheelchairs.

### ***If I can't find a dentist what do I do?***

You should speak to your local PCT. They have a duty of care to provide you with dental treatment. Most PCTs will make an effort to find you a dentist. If they are

unable or unwilling to do so, speak to the Disability Rights Commission. Most people who have a disability can be treated in general dental practice by a highstreet dentist. It is usually only when a person has a moderately severe or severe disability or complex medical condition that they need to see a specialist.

***Will the new NHS dental contract help people with Special Care Dentistry gain access to care?***

It is unlikely that the new NHS dental contract will improve access to dental care for people with a disability. It may even make things worse as there is no longer a fee to dentists for providing home care. This may mean that people who are confined to home or who live in residential care will find it more difficult to get a dentist to visit them at home

***None of the practices around me are ground floor and I can't climb stairs. What should I do?***

You can either approach an individual practice or your PCT for help. As service providers, dentists are obliged to provide you with the same quality of service as a non-disabled person. If the premises are not accessible to you, they have to provide care by an alternative route such as a home visit.

***The dental practice I visited wouldn't let me take my guide dog into the premises.***

Speak to the receptionist or dentist and explain why you need your dog with you. They should let the dog accompany you. If they still refuse, speak to your PCT and/or the Disability Rights Commission.