

Patient experience of Dentists in Newham

A view faces and service quality



December 2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthwatch Newham conducted two pieces of research in 2017 which found that 65% of dental practices could not provide a routine appointment within 2 weeks. Further research in February 2019 showed that 45% of practices were not able to provide emergency appointments, or referrals to alternative care, with waiting times for appointments up to 3 months in half of the practices. This led the current research to review access and service quality at NHS dental practices once an appointment is obtained.

Key findings

Experiences of patient care:

- 84% of patients feel involved in the decision making about their dental care.
- 78% of patients felt that doctors explain their medical condition.
- 80% understand their treatment and 75% feel listened to during appointments.
- 100% of patients reported being satisfied with their dental practice.

Emergency appointments

- All emergency appointments were booked by long-term patients only.
- Practices declined emergency appointments to walk-in patients due to capacity.

Routine appointments

- 54% of patients waited around 1 to 2 weeks for an appointment.
- 8% of patients reported 2 to 4 weeks waiting time and a further 16% up to one month.
- Most patients were satisfied with the waiting times for routine appointments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Patients enjoyed establishing a long-term relationship with their dentist.
- Newham dentists do a good job, ensuring patients feel in charge of their care.
- Although routine and emergency appointments are more easily available, compared to past reviews, this was not the case for walk-in patients' emergency appointments.
- Older people did not perceive visiting a dentist as a priority and only visited dentists in emergencies. They were also unclear about the implications of treatment.

Recommendation

1. Review the allocation of NHS appointments in Newham to ensure appointments, including for emergency, are available for resident and walk-in patients. (NHS England)
2. Reception staff to explain how the different NHS price bands change depending on the treatment to ensure patients understand what they are paying for. (NHS England)
3. Encourage older people to visit the dentist more often by offering support with booking an appointment, ensuring practices are accessible and providing targeted information. (Public Health and Social Care)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthwatch Newham would like to acknowledge all those who have contributed to this project. To whom we thank:

- Healthwatch Newham's team of volunteers who dedicated their time to this project.
- The participating dental practices who took time to receive our team.
- The patients of Newham who shared their experiences with the team, as well as the community group, who took the time to engage with us.

INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch Newham is part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give service users of health and social care services a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people's views on Newham services, both good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience and liaise with local commissioners and decision-makers, to improve services.

Healthwatch Newham conducted a review of dental practices across Newham in 2017¹ to investigate the availability of routine NHS dentist appointments, following feedback that residents were finding difficult to secure an appointment. The research revealed that 65% of practices could not offer a routine NHS appointment for children or adults within two weeks. Due to continuing feedback, Healthwatch Newham conducted further research in February 2019² to re-evaluate the service. This research revealed that whilst 86% of practices were taking new NHS patients, a significant proportion (45%) of Newham dentists contracted to provide NHS routine appointments had waiting times between 4 weeks to 3 months. Of these, almost 50% of practices were not able to provide urgent or emergency treatment and 45% of practices required an NHS number to register new patients.

Given these difficulties around accessing NHS dental services, Healthwatch Newham conducted the current research to assess the quality of the service once an appointment was obtained using mixed methodology. A team of Healthwatch Newham staff and volunteers visited 21 NHS dental practices between August and September 2019. A focus group with elderly clients was also conducted.

This research aims to

- Understand patients' experiences of attending dental appointments and the quality of the care received by the dental practice staff;
- Learn about patients' experiences of registering with an NHS dentist in Newham;
- Learn about patients' experiences of booking routine and/or emergency appointments with their dental practice;
- To observe accessibility to dental clinics in Newham;

¹ Healthwatch Newham (2017). Healthwatch Newham Mystery Shopping [online]. Available from: https://www.healthwatchnewham.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/dental_practices_review_february_2019.pdf

² Healthwatch Newham (2019). Dental Practices Review February 2019 [online]. Available from: https://www.healthwatchnewham.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/dental_practices_review_february_2019.pdf

METHODOLOGY

Healthwatch Newham visited all NHS dental practices to investigate the quality of service using a questionnaire, observe patients' experiences and test the accessibility of the buildings. A focus group was also conducted in partnership with an organisation working with elderly clients to ensure the views of vulnerable individuals were included in the research.

Dental practice visits

At the time of this research, there were 29 dental practices in Newham. Of these 4 were either private or provided specialised services and 25 provided NHS appointments. Of the 25 NHS dental practices, 4 did not respond or did not allow us to visit. In August 2019, Healthwatch Newham reviewed 21 dental practices that provide NHS appointments in Newham. Practices were contacted and advised about the project and provided with possible dates and times for our visits. Visits took place between August and September 2019. The team consisted of Healthwatch Newham staff and volunteers. Most reception staff were friendly and expecting our visit, however, 6 practices were hesitant and requested the visit to be rescheduled. The purpose of the visits was to engage with patients in the reception area, to explore their experiences of registering with dental practices, booking appointments and the quality of service they received. Patients were asked to complete a short questionnaire using a Likert-scales (See Appendix I).

Focus Group

To ensure that our sample included residents who have traditionally struggled to access NHS services including dentists, Healthwatch Newham contacted one of the borough's community organisations which provides daytime activities for older residents. We wanted to better understand the experiences of older people with mobility issues and how they access dental services. The group lasted 1 hour, and the questions asked were semi-structured based on the questionnaire used for the dental practice visits.

Participant demographics

- A total of 55 participants (25% males, 63% females) responded to the questionnaire.
- 45 (82%) experiences were regarding adults and 9 (16%) were about children.
- 50 (91%) were NHS patients, 4 (7%) were private, and 1 (2%) did not identify.
- Age ranged from 18 to 80+ years old:

18-30, 8 (15%)	61-70, 5 (9%)
31-45, 17 (31%)	71-80, 1(2%)
46-60, 14 (25%)	80+, 2 (4%)

- The sample group closely matched Newham demographics, with Asian being the most prevalent (41%), followed by Mixed/other (20%), White British (16%) and Black (11%).
- The focus group involved 12 elderly participants (5 males, 7 females)

Enter & View DISCLAIMER:

This report relates only to the service observed on the date of the visit, and is representative of the views of the staff, visitors and residents who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.

FINDINGS

Experiences of registering with dental practices

- 42 (76%) were long-term patients, as well as their families, of the dental practises. This long-term relationship and consistency seemed to be important to people. Of the remaining, 5 (9%) were recent patients having been registered between 2 to 6 months and 7 (12%) were first-time visitors.

"I have been coming here my whole life."

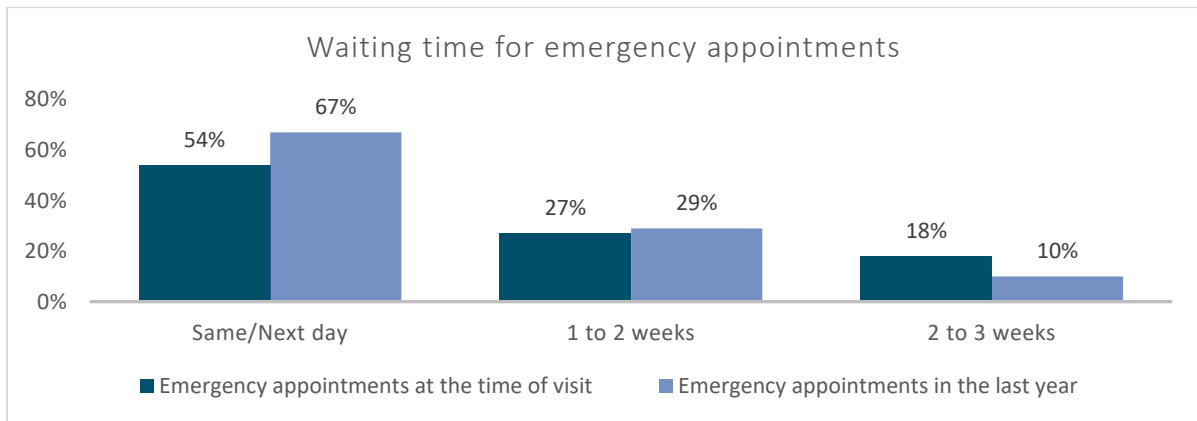
"Seen the same dentist for two years, I like consistency."

"I have been seeing them for about 15 years, so I have a good relationship"

- 26 (47%) had been asked for proof of address during registration. However, most of them, 21 (81%) were long-term patients, therefore, had registered up to 20 years ago when the regulations may have differed to the ones currently.
- 18 (33%) patients had not been asked for proof of address.
- The remaining 20% could not remember or did not complete this question.
- 7 (13%) patients were asked for some sort of ID before treatment. However, when asked to specify, answers included medical records, NHS cards, and benefit letters. Most practices that the team visited asked patients to update their medical records, such as contact details and health issues before the appointment. However, patients should not be required to show an NHS card to receive treatment. Pre-payment of consultations was also a requirement in most dental practices.

Booking emergency and routine appointments

When asked the reason for being at the dentist, 42 (76%) reported being on a routine appointment, followed by 11 (20%) on an emergency appointment. The remaining 2 patients did not specify. When the Healthwatch Newham team visited the dental clinics, all 11 emergency appointments had been booked by long-term patients only. Half (6, 54%) had been booked either within the previous or same day, 3 (27%) in the last 1 to 2 weeks and 2 (18%) longer than 2 weeks (see Graph 1.).



Graph 1. Percentage of the waiting period for emergency appointments during dental practices visits and in the last year.

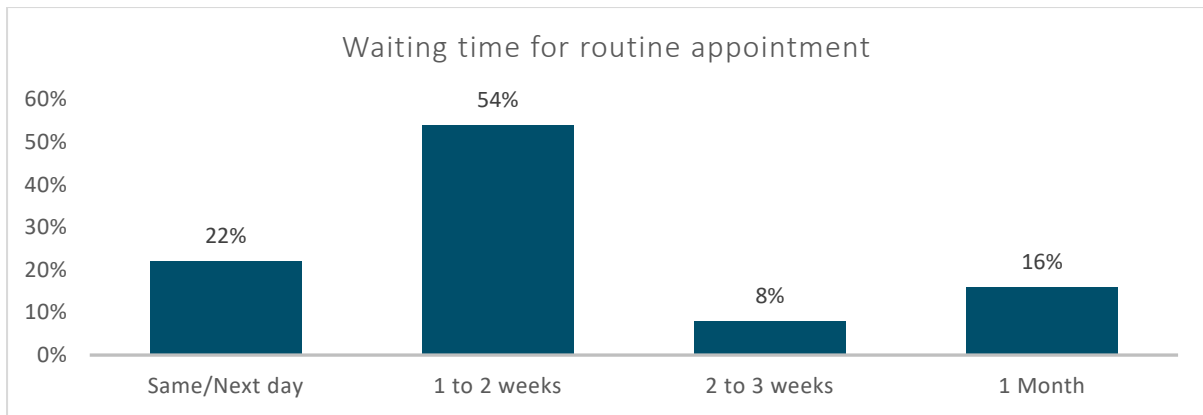
The Healthwatch Newham team also inquired about previous experiences of booking emergency appointments, in which 25 patients reported booking one in the last year. Of those, 21 (84%) were able to book at their usual dental clinic. From the remaining 4 (19%) only 1 was advised on alternative care, which was to call Royal London Dental Hospital. On average, 14 (67%) of these appointments were booked either within the same or next day. In some cases, 6 (29%) patients were required to wait between 1-2 weeks and 2 (10%) patients up to 2-4 weeks (see Graph 1.).

The team also observed that dental practices were declining emergency appointments to walk-in patients due to lack of capacity. Patients were told this was because emergency appointments were reserved for registered patients. Non-registered patients were required to wait until practices' lists were open to taking new clients, to be able to register and were not granted an appointment regardless if it was an emergency³. Emergency appointments should be available to everyone, registered or not, and this should be made clear to patients to avoid misunderstandings.

For routine appointments, on average

- 20 (54%) patients waited around 1 to 2 weeks in Newham.
- 8 (22%) patients reported that their practices required patients to call the reception early in the morning for an appointment within the same or next day.
- A smaller number of patients reported longer waiting times: 3 (8%) patients who waited from 2 to 4 weeks and 6 (16%) patients who waited up to one month (see Graph 2.) for their routine appointment.
- There were no observed differences in age, gender and ethnic background in waiting times for routine appointments.

³ Non-registered patients were not interviewed for this report. These events were observed by the team when visiting the practices.



Graph 2. Percentage of the waiting period for a routine appointment.

When asked about their views on waiting time, most patients interviewed revealed to be satisfied, considering they were mainly visiting the dentist for routine appointments. Some patients mentioned that the times worked for them as they must juggle their schedules between caring for children and shift work. Of those in the elderly focus group, only 4 had been to a dentist in the last year, all for routine appointments. Most did not perceive dental appointments as a priority and would only visit the dentist in case of an emergency. This is a pattern observed across the nation, with those over the age of 85 being the least likely group to visit the dentist⁴.

“As long as I can eat and drink, teeth don’t bother me”

Accessibility

- All but 1 patient that was interviewed did not require adjustments to be made for their appointment. However, more than half of the participants from the focus group had limited mobility, including wheelchair users.
- All reported being able to access their usual dental practice, except 1 patient from the focus group. This patient did not consider registering to an alternative practice with better accessibility options.
- Other than 4 patients, everyone else interviewed spoke fluent English. The 4 patients who did not, did not request interpreting services as their dentist spoke their language. They were both of Asian background.
- Of the 21 practices visited, 11 (52%) were fully accessible. This means wheelchair users and those with mobility limitations could access the dental practice from the street, with enough space in the reception area, reach the consultation room and use a disabled toilet. 4 (19%) were partially accessible, meaning although such practices were on the ground floor, they either lacked a disabled toilet or enough space in the waiting area for wheelchairs. Lastly, 6 (26%) were not accessible at all.

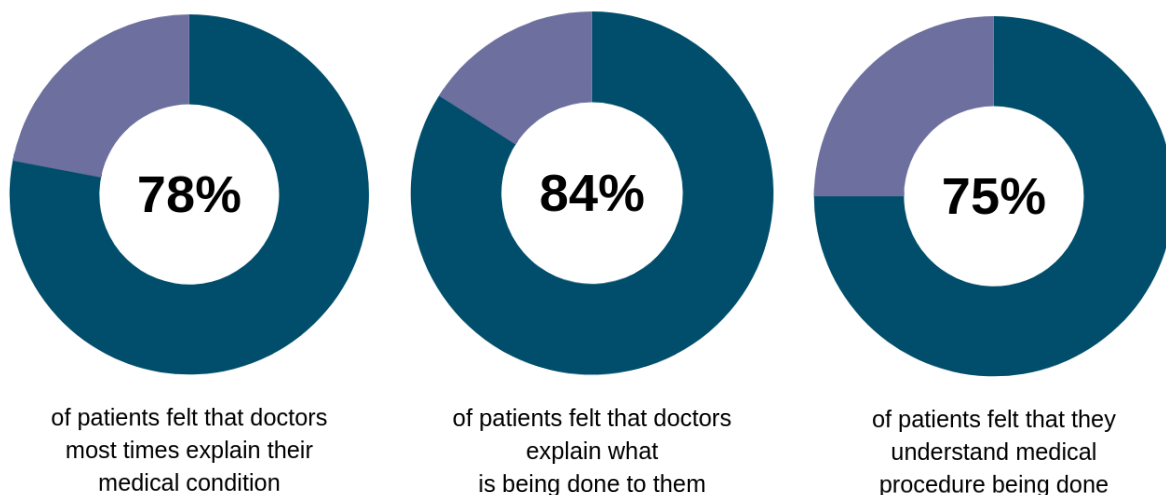
⁴ Adult Dental Health Survey Report (NHS 2009). Available from: <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/publicationimport/pub01xxx/pub01086/adul-dent-heal-surv-summ-them-the8-2009-re10.pdf>

Experiences of patient care during appointments

The team found that all dental practices displayed the NHS prices poster in their waiting rooms. Before receiving treatment, 36 (65%) of those asked reported that their dentist always makes any potential charges clear. All parents and the elderly were aware that theirs or their children's treatments were free. 9 (16%) patients disagreed or were not sure whether this information was shared with them. The remaining 10 (18%) patients did not respond to this question. It was also observed that at times NHS patients were told about treatment charges, but these were not explained to them. One patient was observed asking the reception staff:

"Can you explain to me why they are always changing the price? I don't understand it... Last time it was one price, this time it's was another..."

During appointments, 43 (78%) of patients felt that doctors most times explain their medical condition and 46 (84%) patients agreed that they are also told what is being done to them. This makes patients feel more involved in the decision making about their dental care. The results show that 41 (75%) of those interviewed felt listened to during appointments and 45 (81%) felt confident to ask questions. Of the 55 patients, 44 (80%) agreed they understood the treatment overall and 41 (75%) understood the medical procedure being done.



Graph 3. Percentages of patients who agreed that doctors explain medical conditions, what is being done and understood the medical procedure.

Most importantly, 37 (67%) patients understood the implications of treatments they receive, which is an important aspect of the decision-making for their care. This was not the case among the elderly participants in the focus group. Most agreed that they felt listened to, that the staff were helpful, and the dentist explained what was being done. However, they did not understand the implications of their treatments, for example, that pain would be a side effect. This led to elderly patients feeling confused, distressed, and not cared for. A previous NHS

report has shown that negative patient care experiences correlate to less frequent further visits to the dentist⁴.

“Although I am old, I still want my teeth. They do this because they don’t care that I’m old”

Overall and despite of some difficulties, patients interviewed reported a very positive experience of staff and doctors, being satisfied with their dental practice and that they would recommend the dental practices to their friends and family. All patients agreed that staff at their dental practice are respectful and friendly.

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented within this report highlight that residents in Newham are satisfied with the service they receive from the dental practices in general.

- Patients enjoyed establishing a long-term relationship with their dental practice, including both doctors and staff. This is particularly true for those who do not speak English and attend a clinic in which their native language is spoken by the doctor. Good patient-doctor relationships are essential for patient satisfaction and adherence to treatment of good care (Jones & Huggins, 2014).
- According to those interviewed, dentists in Newham do a good job of ensuring patients feel in charge of their care, understand their treatment and medical conditions.
- In comparison to the 2019 report, both routine and emergency appointments were more easily available, with the majority being booked within the same or next day. However, this only relates to long term patients, as walk-in patients seem to continue to face issues and delays, as most practices seem to prioritise emergency appointments for registered patients.
- On occasions patients were unclear about the pay scales and what they were being charged for.
- Older people did not perceive visiting a dentist as a priority and only did so in emergencies. They were also found to be unclear about the implications of treatment and therefore reluctant to visit a dentist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Healthwatch Newham recommends the following to improve the quality of service in dental practices:

Recommendation	Recommendation for:
<p>1. NHS England to review to allocation of NHS appointments in Newham to ensure sufficient appointments are available for residents. This should also include careful consideration of emergency appointments for walk-in patients, given Newham’s high transient population. All three reports produced to date showed that there is a need to review the allocation of NHS dentist appointments in Newham toa address the current availability constraints.</p>	<p>NHS England</p>
<p>2. Reception staff need to explain how the different NHS price bands change depending on the treatment to ensure patients understand what they are paying for and reduce patient anxiety and distress.</p>	<p>NHS England</p>
<p>3. Older people should be encouraged to visit the dentist more often, either by offering support with making an appointment, ensuring practices are accessible and providing more targeted support and information to older people.</p>	<p>Public Health and Social Care.</p>

APPENDIX I

Dental Practice Questionnaire

Introduction to patients:

Show HW name badge and leaflet. Hello, I'm XX and work for Healthwatch Newham. We are funded by Newham Council. We listen to local residents' experiences and views of health and social care. We then talk to senior staff in the council and NHS to try to improve services.

Could I just ask you a few questions about your dentist? We don't take your name or address. You don't have to answer anything if you don't want to.

No.	Area	Comments
1.	For how long have you been coming to this surgery?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 – 1 month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 6 months <input type="checkbox"/> 7 – 12 months <input type="checkbox"/> Longer than a year
<u>Booking experiences</u>		
2.	Are you here on a....	<input type="checkbox"/> Routine appointment <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency appointment
2.1	How long did you have to wait to get this appointment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Same/next day <input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 2 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> 1 month <input type="checkbox"/> 1 month+
2.2	How did you feel about the waiting time for the appointment?	
3.	Have you had to book emergency appointments over the last year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.1.	If so, was there an appointment available?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.1.1	If yes, roughly how long did you have to wait for it?	<input type="checkbox"/> Same/next day <input type="checkbox"/> 2- 4 days <input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 7 days <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week +
3.1.2.	If not, did your practice advise you where to go for alternative care for your emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.2.	Comments on this experience: - <i>Did the emergency treatment sort out your problem?</i>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was it easy for you to get to the dentist/surgery/hospital if you had to go elsewhere? - Did you have to pay for it? If so, were you told about these charges beforehand? 	
4.	<p>Do you require your dentist to make adjustments for your appointment such as a language or sign language interpreter, mobility adjustments, etc.?</p> <p>If so, please share your experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - booking the interpreting service? Could they do this on their own? - Were they asked to bring a family member/friend instead? - Was interpreting via phone or in person? How was the experience? - Able to get in the building? Use the toilets? Etc. 	
<u>Patient experience</u>		
5.	The staff (dentists, nurses, receptionists) are respectful and polite.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
6.	I have been asked to show identification/proof of address to register.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
7.	I have had to show identification before receiving a treatment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, please specify which type _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No

<u>Appointment experiences</u>		
8.	My dentist always explains what they are doing during the appointment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree

9.	I feel that I am listened to and that my concerns are addressed during the appointment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
9.	I feel that I am involved in the decision making about my care:	
9.1.	I understand the procedure	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
9.2.	I understand the treatment	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
10.	My dentist makes sure I understand my medical condition during the appointment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
11.	I understand the process and potential implications of having treatment. <i>such as 'are you told you might experience pain during and after the procedure'</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
12.	The dentist/staff always explain any charges for treatment before the treatment starts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
13.	I usually feel confident to ask my doctor more questions about treatment and possible its side effects.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree

<u>Final thoughts</u>		
14.	Finally, in general how satisfied are you with your dentist practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Extremely satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Very satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Not satisfied
14.1.	I would recommend this dentist practice to my friends and family.	<input type="checkbox"/> I strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> I agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither <input type="checkbox"/> I disagree <input type="checkbox"/> I strongly disagree
15.	Other comments:	

16.	<p>It would be helpful if you could provide some information about yourself, which helps us check the service for all of Newham's residents.</p> <p>Would you mind ticking or answering the following questions?</p>	<p>Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p> <p>Age: <input type="checkbox"/> 18-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-60 <input type="checkbox"/> 61-70 <input type="checkbox"/> 71-80 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 80 <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p> <p>Ethnicity:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> African Traveller <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Asian British <input type="checkbox"/> Black/Black British <input type="checkbox"/> White British or Irish Gypsy or Irish</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Iraqi <input type="checkbox"/> Iranian <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed/multiple ethnicities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Romanian <input type="checkbox"/> Somali <input type="checkbox"/> Turkish <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p> <p>Is English the language you use most often? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO, If NO, what is the language? _____</p>
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REFERENCES

Jones, L.M. and Huggins, T.J., 2014. Empathy in the dentist-patient relationship: review and application. *NZ Dent J*, 110(3), pp.98-104.