

COVID-19 Recovery Guidance Patient Communication

The aim of this guidance is to aid good communication in the COVID-19 recovery phase.

1. Preparations for Good Communication

- Take the time now to prepare your communications.
- Speak to key members of your team and agree on how you are going to prioritise patients and how you are going to deal with common situations.
- Write social media posts but do not publish them until the right time. Think about when you wish to send messages out. You need to give patients time to see, understand and respond to messages. If you will be relying on patients sharing your posts, you need to allow for this so it's always worth starting a few days sooner if you feel this will help to increase the number of people who will see your posts.
- You can also prepare patient flyers and print these in advance of the practice opening.
- Make sure all your team understands what the plan is to ensure consistency during conversations with patients.
- Create a quick reference card for everyone for ease when speaking with patients.
- You need to be clear in your messaging.

2. Prioritising Patients

Priority 1

- Those who have had a problem with their brace since you have been closed that you have been unable to satisfactorily resolve
- Patients in active treatment who are at a stage in treatment where unwanted tooth movements will cause an issue
- Those who have recently (within 6 months) finished treatment but have broken or lost their retainer

Priority 2

- Patients with retainer problems more than 6 months post finishing treatment
- Those requiring repairs to their brace which have occurred since re-opening the practice

- Patients who are long overdue an adjustment or are at a stage of treatment when active monitoring is desirable
- Patients with known oral health issues

Priority 3

- Those nearing the end of treatment
- Patients due to start treatment with aligners, where the aligners have been made (pre-lockdown) and are ready to be fitted.
- Patients who have had removable appliance made (pre-lockdown) and it is ready to be fitted

Priority 4

- New patient consultations
- De-bonds
- Bond ups
- Retainer checks in the absence of problems

Please note, decisions on prioritising patients will need to be reviewed and based on clinical best practice along with up to date guidance from GDC, CQC.

3. Preparing Patients for Change

- Once clinical work resumes and decisions are made about prioritising patients and which treatments are to be provided, there may be a number of changes that you will want to prepare your patients for.

This information can be provided in a letter, via your website, email and social media. This will help to pave the way for conversations you may need to have either over the phone or in the practice. **(See template letter- link to the letter)**

- To comply with social- distancing it is important that patient communication clearly reminds them that they should attend alone if at all possible.
- You should provide information in advance of appointments explaining the new PPE, why it is important, and how it protects you and the patient. This is best done with photos or video of familiar team members just to reassure patients. Some younger patients will readily identify with PPE worn by other services such as a fire- fighters so it may be best to link the two and explain how your PPE is protecting you from something you cannot see.

- If you are unable to undertake certain orthodontic procedures (Aerosol generating procedures such as bond-ups and de-bonds), a simple sheet explaining the reasons for this decision, how long the delay is likely to be and alternative options would be helpful. For example, if you are to go ahead with the removal of the brace but cannot remove the residual adhesive, this needs to be explained to the patient.
- Please also remember that the issue may be with getting the retainer from the lab so if this is the case, please mention this, so patients understand the decision is in their best interest.
- Some patients may have experienced a broken fixed or removable retainer and their teeth may have moved since this happened. This is going to be more challenging to deal with and patients will need to understand their options and whether this will be covered by the NHS or by you if they are a private patient. Some information should be prepared outlining options and timeframes as this is something that is likely to cause disappointment and concern unless handled appropriately.