

Briefing notes on 'free examinations'

Monitoring of FV applications in Q1 & Q2 2021/2 during ongoing Covid-19 response and recovery prior to Contract Reform Restart:

In current GDS/PDS Regulations, patients aged 18-25 and those aged 60 and over are entitled to a 'free examination' in Wales. However, the 'free examination' does not include fluoride varnish application or radiographs, if required. Patients within these groups who require a radiograph and/or fluoride varnish application would be required to pay a Band 1 charge of £14.70, unless they were entitled to free treatment on exemption grounds.

Clinicians are reminded that a full and comprehensive examination of dentate adults and children does need to include taking radiographs, where appropriate, at recommended intervals. Therefore, from time to time a Band 1 charge would apply (to those eligible to pay) as per current Regulations when radiographs are required.

Practices report that some patients in these groups are reluctant to pay the Band 1 patient charge if a fluoride varnish application is needed; particularly so the 18-25 lower income groups. Clinicians report being accused of 'up-selling' prevention to profit. In the contract reform programme, ahead of planned legislative change and amendment to the FP17W, participating practices 'could' offer fluoride varnish (FV) and radiographs without a patient charge being levied. However, it could not be 'claimed' on the FP17W without triggering a charge, therefore, practices in the contract reform programme were required to keep a local record for reporting purposes. As the contract reform programme has been paused since April 2020 this arrangement is no longer in place.

In this current and ongoing period of Covid-19 response and recovery, UDAs continue to be suspended, however, all other regulatory requirements of GDS contracts and PDS agreements are extant. In the delivery of NHS care, dentists and their teams are being asked to address priority needs, inequalities and step up preventive care.

Levying a patient charge for FV application will impact on relatively few patients in Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22, namely those in these two adult age groups who are at risk of decay (amber for decay) and eligible to pay patient charges. **To ensure there are no barriers to adults who are at risk of decay benefitting from FV application, a work around (so that FV application can be reported on FP17W but not trigger a patient charge) is sought and 'how to report and claim' information will be advised soon in April 2021.**

Radiographs are diagnostic and remain chargeable. There is a need for clinical teams and patients to 'value' early diagnosis and prevention as well as treatment.

Other adults in these 'free examination' groups do not present an issue if they are in the Green or Red risk/need groups following an ACORN. Patients, who are not at risk of, nor do they have active decay (Green for decay) – do not require FV in any case. Those who have active decay (Red for decay) would require treatment in addition to FV application/radiographs and would be paying a patient charge in any case - if eligible to do so.

All practices are expected to complete a full 'risk and need assessment' ACORN once per annum for all patients. The findings give an indication of the practice population

need and support recall interval and preventive intervention decision making. In recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic all dental practices in Wales with NHS contracts are being asked to prioritise those patients with greatest need, step up prevention and open access. This can be supported by all adults in these (eligible for free examination) groups who are Amber at risk of decay, having a FV application without a charge.

The expectation is that in Q1 of 2021/22, FV will be applied to at least 80% of all adult patients who have decay (RED decay ACORN finding) and/or who are at risk of decay (AMBER decay ACORN finding). Less than 50% of adult patients routinely attending NHS dentistry in Wales have or are at risk of decay. Given that those who have active decay will have a charge levied in any case for other treatment requirements, if they are not exempt, means very few adults who are at risk of decay (but who do not require radiographs) **not** paying a band 1, even if not exempt from patient charges. Practitioners and patients will welcome this flexibility.

Practices are being asked to ensure all adults in these groups who would benefit from FV application (Amber or Red for decay) are offered and receive it. The 80% 'floor target' makes allowance for those who are unable to receive FV (allergies) and for those who would refuse for personal reasons. **This advice removes a 'perceived or real' economic barrier to achieving this step up in preventive intervention.** The need to review and change Regulation on 'free examinations' so that radiographs are also included will again be part of the Primary Dental Care Reform Programme Re-Start.

In Summary:

- Patients with no active disease and at low risk of tooth decay (**GREEN** rating for tooth decay) should not be offered more than one 'free examination' in any given year. They should have radiographs, if appropriate, once every two years. There is no requirement to apply fluoride varnish to adults who are disease free and at low risk of tooth decay (**GREEN** ACORN decay rating). Emphasise the importance of twice-daily effective brushing with fluoride toothpaste.
- Patients at risk of tooth decay (**AMBER** rating for tooth decay) require radiographs at intervals, as appropriate and **all** would benefit from preventive intervention including advice, prescription of higher strength fluoride toothpaste/rinse and the application of fluoride varnish. The FV can be applied at the ACORN visit and repeated in any preventive follow-up visits, led by a DCP. This intervention when noted on FP17W **will not** trigger a Band 1 patient charge. The % of this group receiving FV will be monitored in Q1 & Q2 of 2021/22.
- Patients who have active decay (**RED**) will require personalised proactive prevention as mentioned above in AMBER. Some with severe decay will require stabilising and all will require treatment (Band 1 or 2) and therefore, a patient charge will apply in any case. The % of this group receiving FV will be monitored in Q1 & Q2 of 2021/22.