

# DENTISTS

Finding a dentist who will do work on the NHS is not always easy, says Laura Swaffield.

**A** dentist has taken a five-year degree course and has probably done extra training on top of that.

Other members of the dental team are the dental surgery assistant, the dental technician and the dental hygienist, who concentrates on keeping teeth healthy.

## THE DENTAL PRACTICE

Usually, people go to the local 'general dental practitioner'— a sort of dental GP who can deal with most things: fillings, crowns and bridges, full or partial dentures, problem wisdom teeth, and so on.

Some dentists have a particular interest, such as children, gum disease, disabled people — even dental phobia! So if you have a special requirement, do some detective work. (Remember that carers must look after themselves, too. A painful mouth is the last thing you need.)

## USEFUL INFORMATION

### British Dental Association

64 Wimpole Street  
London W1M 8AL  
Tel: 0171 935 0875

### British Dental Health Foundation

Eastlands Court  
St Peter's Road  
Rugby  
Warwickshire CV21 3QP  
Tel: 01788 546365

### General Dental Council

37 Wimpole Street  
London W1M 7AE  
Tel: 0171 486 2171

## THE HOSPITAL

Occasionally, a general dental practitioner will refer a patient to a local hospital with a dental unit, where the dentists have specialised in such areas as surgery. A specific medical condition, an unusually awkward wisdom tooth, a congenital abnormality or repair after damage are likely to fall into this category.

## COMMUNITY DENTAL SERVICE

For many kinds of special requirements, the NHS community dental service is the answer. It deals primarily with expectant mothers, children, old people, and mentally or physically handicapped

people, and is totally free.

The service works in local health authority surgeries, or in mobile clinics that can travel to schools, residential homes and even your own home. It carries out much the same work as a general dental practice.

## FINDING A DENTIST

If you care for someone with special needs, you should find that they have easy access to the community dental service, through the professionals you are in contact with.

Otherwise, find a good general dental practitioner. Ask around, and also ask your local family health services authority (FHSA) or (in Scotland) health board. Find them in the 'phone book. Use the same sources to track down the community dental service.

## MONEY

Take care: when you go to a general dental practitioner, be sure you or the person you care for are accepted as an NHS patient. There is a long-running battle (over money) between the NHS and dentists, and many are refusing to take any more NHS patients. If you can't find anyone, complain to the FHSA.

Many people have to pay something towards even NHS treatment. Currently, the exceptions to this include people who receive, or whose partner receives, Income Support or Family Credit.

But people who receive other social security benefits, including disability and carers' allowances, may also be eligible for free or reduced-cost treatment. The claim form (AG1) is available at the dentist.