# Student's near-fatal ordeal highlights NHS dental care crisis



Nick Whelan, a 22-year-old student from Dundee, has recounted his harrowing experience of being unable to secure an NHS dentist appointment, which led to a severe health crisis. In 2021, Whelan suffered from agonising toothache but faced significant delays in obtaining dental care. He was forced to rely on painkillers over a six-month period, during which time an infection developed into blood poisoning, ultimately resulting in a coma. His family received dire warnings from doctors about the possibility of him not surviving the ordeal.

Speaking to the Mirror, Whelan expressed his belief that dental health is crucial, stating, “Dentistry is not an optional extra. It is a vital part of our lives.” He argued that had he been able to see a dentist when he first sought help, he would not have faced such dire consequences. Whelan, alongside the British Dental Association, has since produced a video highlighting the plight of patients struggling to access NHS dental services, particularly on World Oral Health Day.

New polling conducted by Ipsos reveals that Whelan's experience is far from unique. The survey, which interviewed 1,091 British adults, found that a quarter of those who were unable to get an NHS appointment in the past two years resorted to self-treatment, including pulling out their own teeth. Almost one in five respondents stated they had sought dental care abroad due to the scarcity of local NHS services. The poll also indicated that 69% of participants who could not access NHS care had to turn to private dental services, signifying a significant shift in how people are seeking dental treatment in the UK.

Eddie Crouch, chairman of the British Dental Association, remarked, "Desperate people are reaching for pliers or cheap flights because for many NHS dentistry has effectively ceased to exist. This service can have a future, but only if government is willing to pick up pace and keep its promises." Crouch's comments underscore the increasingly dire state of NHS dental care, which has reportedly seen around 96% of dental practices refusing new adult NHS patients.

The polling data also highlights a growing concern among the public. Seventy-four per cent of respondents expressed considerable worry about the availability of dental care on the NHS. Additionally, half of those surveyed were not confident they would be able to secure a routine appointment, while a similar percentage shared doubts about receiving emergency care from NHS dentists.

Patients are feeling the financial strain, with NHS dental charges set to increase on April 1. The costs for various treatment bands will rise, including Band 1 care, which encompasses check-ups and X-rays, increasing to £27.40 from £26.80. The growing financial burden has led to fears that many families may forgo necessary dental check-ups, potentially leading to more severe health issues down the line.

The Department of Health and Social Care acknowledged the crisis, with a spokesperson stating, "NHS dentistry is broken after years of neglect, forcing patients to resort to desperate measures." The government has announced plans to roll out 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments and aims to implement reforms to improve the dental contract, but the success of these initiatives remains contingent on securing adequate funding from the Treasury.

Nick Whelan's alarming situation and the wider implications of the Ipsos poll echo growing frustration among the public regarding NHS dental care access, challenging the government to address these issues without delay.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.mccollumconsultants.com/article/missed-nhs-dental-appointments-worsening-access-to-care/> - This article highlights the crisis in NHS dentistry, including the impact of missed appointments on access to care and the financial strain on dental practices. It supports the claim that NHS dental services are under significant pressure.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/what-happens-when-you-visit-the-dentist/> - This NHS webpage explains the process of visiting an NHS dentist and the importance of attending appointments, which aligns with the concerns about access to dental care.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/guide-to-nhs-waiting-times-in-england/> - This guide provides information on NHS waiting times, which can be relevant to understanding delays in accessing dental care, though it does not specifically address dental services.
* <https://www.bda.org/> - The British Dental Association's website often discusses issues related to NHS dental care, including access problems and the need for reform, which aligns with Eddie Crouch's comments.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care> - The Department of Health and Social Care's website may contain statements or announcements about NHS dental care reforms and funding, reflecting the government's acknowledgment of the crisis.
* <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk> - Ipsos conducts public surveys, including those related to healthcare access and concerns, which could support the polling data mentioned in the article about NHS dental care.
* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/i-couldnt-nhs-dentist-appointment-34900252> - Please view link - unable to able to access data