

Our ref: EH/DMcC/JH/GDPs

18 August 2020

To all Northern Ireland General Dental Practices (GDPs)

Dear Registered Person

We would like to take this opportunity to provide a further update regarding the 2020/21 inspection programme for GDPs.

Listening to your views and understanding the pressures GDPs are currently facing has been valuable in shaping our inspection approach. To that end, we have made a number of changes to ensure the inspections can be conducted in a sympathetic and supportive way whilst still enabling us to carry out our critical functions.

We plan to conduct a shorter on-site focused inspection that we envisage will take on average 90 minutes. The time of the inspection is flexible and could be outside of GDP opening hours in exceptional cases. Four weeks prior to the inspection we will conduct a support call to the registered person to address any ongoing issues of concern leading up to the inspection.

When conducting an on-site inspection, we will review relevant documentation and meet with staff. Our discussions with staff will be kept to a minimum.

We have been in contact with the Public Health Agency regarding the COVID-19 direct contact risk of inspections. We have received expert advice that, if an inspector visits a GDP with the appropriate PPE, keeps a two metre distance to GDP staff and talks to each member of staff no longer than 15 minutes, any direct contact transmission risk is sufficiently mitigated.

We are aware that the timely validation of equipment and updates to staff training may have been delayed over the COVID-19 period. We will take a risk-based and pragmatic approach to these matters provided that reasonable plans are in place.

We have considered the potential of a remote inspection and would be open to further engagement with representatives of the sector regarding this approach to determine the benefit/burden effect and whether or not this approach provides us with an acceptable level of assurance. We are currently piloting this method of inspections in other areas of our work.

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Whilst we recognise that inspections during this pandemic may cause some GPs concerns, we know that you will fully appreciate the important role of the regulator in giving assurance to the public and the DoH that GPs are operating safely and in line with guidelines and regulations.

If you have any concerns regarding your inspection, please do not hesitate to contact Jo Browne, Senior Inspector on Jo.Browne@RQIA.org.uk

Yours sincerely



Emer Hopkins
Acting Director of Improvement

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