SGA Dental Group – Direct Access Policy for Dental Care Professionals (DCPs)

1. Introduction

At SGA Dental Group, we are committed to providing high-quality, patient-centered care while ensuring compliance with General Dental Council (GDC) regulations on Direct Access. Direct Access allows patients to see certain Dental Care Professionals (DCPs) without a referral from a dentist, ensuring quicker and more efficient access to care.

This policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of dental hygienists, dental therapists, clinical dental technicians, and dental nurses working under Direct Access in our practices.

2. Direct Access Guidelines

2.1 Scope of Practice & Eligibility

DCPs working under Direct Access must:

   • Work strictly within their GDC-defined scope of practice and competence.

   • Ensure they are appropriately trained, competent, and indemnified for all treatments they provide.

   • Refer to a dentist when a patient requires treatment beyond their scope.

2.2 Patient Consent & Communication

   • Patients must be informed that they are being treated under Direct Access without a prior examination by a dentist.

   • DCPs must explain the scope of treatments they can provide and obtain written and verbal consent before proceeding.

   • If a referral to a dentist is necessary, the reason must be clearly explained, and patient consent obtained.

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46 High Street, Thornbury
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239 Greystoke Avenue
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St Pauls Dental
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Ashley Court, 143/153 Ashley
Road, St Pauls, Bristol, BS6 5NW

2.3 Referral to a Dentist/Other Health care professionals

• Hygienists and therapists are not expected to diagnose beyond their scope. They must refer patients if they identify issues requiring a diagnosis or treatment by a dentist.

• If a dentist's intervention is required before treatment begins (e.g., due to medical history, oral health condition, or complexity of treatment), the patient will be referred accordingly.

• Hygienists and therapists practising under direct access are not expected to make a diagnosis beyond their scope of practice. They should refer to a dentist (or other relevant healthcare practitioner) when they identify areas of concern or when treatment is required that is out of their scope of practice.

2.4 Record-Keeping & Documentation

• All patient interactions, treatments, advice, and referrals must be accurately documented in patient records.

• If a referral is made, the details must include the reason for referral, urgency, and the receiving clinician's details.

2.5 Indemnity & Compliance

• All DCPs must have appropriate professional indemnity coverage for services provided under Direct Access.

• They must undertake regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) relevant to their role and Direct Access practice.

2.6 Emergency Protocols

• If a medical emergency arises, DCPs must follow the SGA Dental Group emergency protocol and seek immediate support from a dentist or medical professional.

• Patients presenting with severe pain, infection, or urgent dental issues outside a DCP's scope must be referred to a dentist immediately.

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3. Roles & Responsibilities of DCPs Under Direct Access

3.1 Dental Hygienists & Dental Therapists

- Can provide their full scope of practice (except tooth whitening) without a dentist's prescription.

- Work alongside dentists to provide joint care.

- If a patient presents with medical or dental conditions beyond their scope, they will pause treatment and refer to a dentist.

3.2 Dental Nurses

- Can provide preventive care (e.g., fluoride application) under Direct Access without a dentist's referral.

- Must be appropriately trained, competent, and indemnified for any procedures they perform.

3.3 Clinical Dental Technician

- A Clinical dental technician can directly treat, create and fit a complete set of dentures to patients who have experienced total tooth loss.
- Any treatment provided for patients with teeth or implants is done on prescription from a dentist.

4. Specific Treatments Under Direct Access

4.1 Tooth Whitening

- Tooth whitening requires a dentist's prescription under the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Amendment Regulations 2012.

- While dental hygienists and therapists can be trained in tooth whitening, the procedure must be carried out under the direct supervision of a dentist for the first cycle.

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4.2 Radiography

• Registered dental hygienists and therapists can act as 'operators', 'practitioners', and 'referrers' under the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000 (IR(ME)R).

• Only dentists can provide a full radiographic report.

4.3 Local Anaesthesia (LA)

• Local anaesthetic is a Prescription-Only Medicine (POM), meaning it can only be prescribed by a qualified prescriber (usually a dentist).

• Hygienists and therapists can administer LA under:

• A written patient-specific prescription.

• A Patient Group Direction (PGD), which allows them to administer LA without a prescription under an agreed protocol.

4.4 Patient Group Direction (PGD) for Local Anaesthetic

Under an agreed PGD, a dental therapist can provide local anaesthetic without a specific referral if:

• The patient consents to receiving LA.

• The therapist deems LA necessary for treatment.

• The maximum dose guidelines are strictly followed.

• The therapist is trained in handling adverse reactions (e.g., fainting, allergies, drug interactions).

- This also includes the use of topical anaesthetic.
- The following are routinely available for use:
  • Lignocaine 2% + adrenaline 1:80,000
  • Articaine 4% + adrenaline 1:100,000
  • Mepivicaine 3% + plain [no adrenaline]

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5. Monitoring & Review

     •   This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure compliance with GDC regulations and best practices.

     •   Any regulatory changes will be incorporated, and all DCPs will be updated accordingly.

6. Conclusion

Direct Access at SGA Dental Group is designed to enhance patient care by improving accessibility and efficiency while maintaining safety and regulatory compliance. All DCPs must adhere to this policy to ensure high standards of care and compliance with GDC regulations.

Approved by: Shivani Bhandari

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