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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Ein cyf/Our ref FM/00251/08

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I am writing in response to your letter of 23 April about access to NHS dentistry in Gwynedd following your question on the subject to me in the Assembly on 22 April.

The statistics you referred to of 38% of the population who have access to NHS dental services in north Gwynedd and 29% in south Gwynedd, are the Local Health Board's (LHB) figures from 2007, projected to take account of the full-year effect and included additional NHS places contracted since that time, compare to 79% for central Gwynedd.

At 31 March 2006, prior to the implementation of the new dental contract, 30,252 people in Gwynedd LHB area were registered with an NHS dentist. This was some 26% of the population. Under the new contract in the two-year period ending 30 September 2007 – the latest available – 43,315 people (37% of the population) had accessed an NHS dentist.

There are still some pockets in some LHB areas where additional access is required, mainly when historically there has been difficulty in attracting NHS dentists, and indeed other services, to rural areas and this has certainly been the case in parts of Gwynedd. The county has one of the lowest number of dentists per head of population in Wales. The Rural Health Plan which is being set up to look at the development of rural health services will wish to consider the provision of NHS dentistry.

A proportion of the additional £30 million for the new dental contract was set aside as for those areas where the greatest difficulty remained in gaining access to NHS dentistry. Gwynedd was one of the areas identified for this additional funding and receives recurring funds of just over £1 million above their general allocation to support proposals to widen access and enhance the development of service provision in the area.

The LHB have worked hard to improve the provision of NHS dentistry in the area but returned funding to the Assembly Government in 2006-07 as it had not been able to commission new dental services until the 2007-08 financial year due to planning difficulties.

The additional funding is now having an impact and has seen the opening of four new dental practices and the expansion of two others, resulting in the increased capacity of some 31,400 new places over the position 2 years ago. These positive developments are to be welcomed.