

## **ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY: Patients & Dental Team**

### **Dental Centre Limited - Policy on Abusive, Aggressive or Violent Behaviour**

#### **Purpose**

At Harmanswater Dental Centre we are committed to providing safe, respectful and compassionate dental care. No member of our team should ever be subjected to abuse, aggression, harassment or violence in any form. We understand dental visits can be stressful, but verbal or physical abuse, threats or harassment are unacceptable. This policy outlines the standards of behaviour expected from all **patients, visitors and the dental team**; and the steps the practice will take if these standards are not met.

#### **1. Standards of Behaviour**

We expect all patients, their relatives and visitors to:

- Treat staff, clinicians and other patients with courtesy and respect
- Communicate appropriately and calmly
- Follow all reasonable instructions given for safety or clinical reasons
- Allow staff to carry out their duties without obstruction or intimidation

#### **2. Unacceptable Behaviour**

The following behaviours (but not limited to) **will not** be tolerated:

- Verbal abuse, shouting, swearing, offensive language, derogatory remarks or harassment
- Threatening behaviour, intimidation or aggressive gestures
- Physical violence or attempted violence
- Discrimination or hateful comments
- Damage to property or refusal to follow safety instructions
- Persistent or repeated behaviour that causes distress

### 3. Practice Response

Depending on severity:

- Verbal warning
  - Minor incidents of unacceptable behaviour will initially be addressed with a calm, professional verbal warning from a member of staff.
  - The patient will be clearly informed that behaviour is unacceptable and that further breaches may result in escalated action.
  - Consideration will be given to any vulnerabilities, disabilities or additional needs, and reasonable adjustments will be made to support understanding and compliance.
- Written warning
  - If behaviour persists, a formal written warning will be issued.
  - The letter will outline the unacceptable behaviour, reference the zero-tolerance policy, and explain the potential consequences of continued breaches.
  - Support options or adjustments, such as alternative communication methods or appointment modifications, will be offered where relevant.
- Removal from premises
  - In cases where behaviour is threatening, aggressive, or unsafe, staff may ask the patient to leave the premises immediately.
  - The practice may call for immediate assistance from emergency services if required.
  - Staff safety and patient safety remain the priority at all times.
- Temporary/permanent removal from the patient list
  - Persistent or serious breaches may result in temporary suspension from receiving services at the practice.
  - In severe or repeated cases, permanent removal from the patient list may be implemented, following NHS guidelines and ensuring patients are informed of their right to alternative care arrangements.
  - Decisions will always consider individual circumstances, including vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments, to ensure fairness and compliance with equality legislation.

- Police involvement for threats or violence
  - Threatening, abusive, or violent behaviour may be reported to the police.
  - The practice will provide a full account of incidents, while maintaining patient confidentiality where appropriate.
  - Police involvement will be considered particularly in cases of assault, harassment, or repeated breaches that jeopardise staff or patient safety.

Note: At each stage, the practice will act in accordance with safeguarding responsibilities, NHS guidance, and legal obligations, balancing staff safety with patient rights and individual needs.

#### **4. Incident Documentation**

- All incidents of unacceptable behaviour are logged in detail, including date, time, staff witnesses, and a full account of the event.
- Each incident record is reviewed by practice management.
- Records are stored securely in line with data protection regulations (GDPR), ensuring confidentiality while allowing authorised staff to access relevant information when needed.

#### **5. Consideration of Vulnerability**

We acknowledge some behaviours arise from health or communication issues. The practice will take into account any vulnerabilities, disabilities or additional needs of patients, ensuring that individuals are treated fairly and with understanding. Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to support patients in complying with practice policies, such as communication support, modified appointment arrangements, or additional time during visits. Enforcement of this policy will always consider individual circumstances, but persistent or serious breaches of unacceptable behavior will be discussed with the patient or carer. The Practice has a responsibility in line with NHS guidance and safeguarding responsibilities for their patients and the dental team.

## **6. Staff Support**

- Debrief and wellbeing
  - Following any incident of aggressive, abusive, or threatening behaviour, staff involved will be offered a debrief to discuss the event, reflect on actions taken, and ensure understanding of next steps.
  - Appropriate support will be provided.
- Access to support resources

Staff will be informed of available support resources, including:

- Wellbeing support for the Dental Team
- Internal managerial support for guidance on procedures and risk mitigation.
- Management will monitor staff wellbeing after incidents and take additional measures if required, including workplace adjustments, further training, or procedural updates.

This approach aligns with NHS guidance on staff safety, wellbeing, and support following workplace violence or challenging patient behaviour.

## **7. Communication**

Policy is displayed in reception and available on request.

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2025

Review: Dec 2026