

Wales on Sunday

August 22nd 2004

ATTILA THE GUM SAVES WELSH SMILES Sick-to-the-teeth patients flocking to Europe for treatment WELSH patients are flocking to Hungary for treatment by a dentist dubbed Attila the Gum.

But they insist he is no barbarian and is taking the pain out of large dental bills.

Despite a 3,000-mile round trip to the surgery in Budapest, patients say they are saving thousands of pounds and dodging the Welsh dental crisis, which saw more than 600 people queue to register with an NHS dentist in Carmarthen offering 300 places last summer and nearly 1,000 people file around the block in Machynlleth in May this year when a new NHS practice opened.

Dr Attila Knott is attracting 25 British patients a month to his surgery by offering "teeth tours" where patients combine intense [dental treatment with sightseeing around the Hungarian capital](#).

A former dentist from Cardiff, Ian Domville, has turned travel agent to become a partner in the venture – Kreativ Dental Tours.

"About four years ago I saw an advert in a newspaper from Attila the Gum," said Mr Domville. "Now we send about 25 people a month there including up to five people from Wales."

The Hungarian surgery has three dentists, six technicians, an oral surgeon, three dental hygienists and no waiting list. They offer treatments only available privately in this country such as [dental implants](#).

"The NHS within Britain is in a bad state," said Mr Domville. "And private dentistry is really expensive. We are not replacing the NHS but we offer an alternative for cosmetic and essential treatment.

"And it is a city break too. From October there will be low cost flights out of Bristol airport to Budapest, making it easier for our Welsh patients."

But Stuart Geddes, director of British Dental Association in Wales, is cynical about the treatment.

He said: "If people are prepared to travel that far for dental care, I am sure they could get the same care here for that cost including travel.

"The thing that would concern me is if it goes wrong. What does the patient do? They have got nowhere they can go for help and advice which you would get if you had it done in this country."

Liberal Democrat leader Mike German said: "It's incredible that people feel they have to go to Hungary to get dental treatment. But for many people that kind of minibreak just isn't an option.

"We need to make NHS dentistry more widely available – that means engaging more salaried NHS community dentists in all parts of Wales."

Plaid Cymru shadow health minister Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM plans to quiz Health Minister Jane Hutt on the issue.

"This is a sad reflection of the situation that patients from Wales have to travel to Hungary to get treatment," he said.

Conservative health and social services spokesman Jonathan Morgan AM said: "Sadly we are becoming increasingly reliant here in Wales upon this type of private innovation because NHS dental treatment is almost non-existent.

"[Kreativ Dental](#) has been imaginative and forward thinking in this regard – I only wish we had a creative (Jane) Hutt so that everyone could benefit."

A National Assembly spokeswoman said: "The decision to pay for private dental treatment whether inside or outside Britain is a matter for the individual concerned. However, Britain has the highest standards of professional care from those providing dental services which is quality-assured and maintained by the General Dental Council.

"The Assembly is aware of the difficulties faced by people accessing an NHS dentist in certain areas of Wales ."

SCANDALOUS: Hundreds queued to join new dentists in Carmarthen and Machynlleth

Help: Dr Attila Knott

By Lucy Ballinger