

## Liverpool Daily Post

### Wirral dental services on brink

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*EXCLUSIVE by Sam Lister Daily Post Staff*

MORE than 100,000 Merseyside patients could be left without an NHS dentist in just two weeks after rows over new contracts.

Practices in Wirral claim the service is on the brink of "meltdown" because they are being set unrealistic targets that would put patients' health at risk.

Now 55 practices have vowed not to sign up to the controversial reforms by the April 1 deadline unless the borough's health executives, who are in charge of negotiating the £20m deal, change the terms.

Most other Merseyside dental surgeries, including the majority of those in Liverpool, are expected to agree to the new conditions. But Wirral dentists will no longer be allowed to practise for the NHS if they refuse, leaving just the three surgeries that have signed up to serve the entire borough.

Neil Thomas, acting secretary of Wirral local dental committee (LDC), said: "Wirral dentists feel the new contract is completely unacceptable.

"They are asking us to sign in dispute and negotiate at leisure.

"The targets are far too high, many practices will be unable to cope. They will be required to do 30% more work for the same amount of money. It would be fair to say the system in Wirral is in danger of meltdown.

"This is a crisis. If we don't sign up it means we cannot legally practise as NHS dentists.

"In my practice for Birkenhead and Wallasey, there are 14,000 patients. Across the borough, there are more than 100,000.

"At the moment, around 55 are expected not to sign up.

"We will continue to try to negotiate with the primary care trust to keep Wirral dentists in the NHS.

"However, this will require the PCT to agree a local contract that allows for the continued provision of high quality preventative dental care."

Wirral LDC claims the contract will:

- \* increase patient charges;
- \* put patients at greater risk of infection;
- \* mean a move away from preventative dentistry;
- \* cause a reduction in the quality of care by increasing targets.

In Liverpool, 67 general dental practitioners have agreed to the government contract, with only one refusing because the practice is closing down.

But Wirral dentists believe they are being given an unfair deal because the borough's primary care trusts have set high targets for the numbers of patients they must see.

They claim the levels are around 30% more than they currently do and will not mean any extra money.

The committee says the trusts have done it to protect themselves because the government will penalise them financially if targets stipulating how much money must be made from charging patients are not met. The more patients dentists see the more likely it is the PCT will meet their goal.

Wirral dentists fear they will have to work so quickly they will not be able to maintain hygiene standards for sterilising equipment between patients.

Mr Thomas added: "The PCT targets are about 30% above what we are working at today.

"We would have to be working at least 10 hours a day and who would want to be the last patient the dentist saw that day?

"The PCTs are trying to make sure they don't have to make up any shortfall.

"But there is a point when you just cannot go any faster."

The controversial reforms brought in by the government will mean a new charging system for patients. All treatments will cost either £15.50, £42.40 or £189. Children whose parents are private patients may lose access to free NHS treatment under the changes.

West Lancashire PCT said they would release figures about the numbers of their dentists who have signed up once the deadline had passed.

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#### **Travel to Budapest for treatment - and save money**

PAUL WESSMAN, 58, a company director from Caldy in Wirral, is due to travel to [Budapest](#) in June for the last of three appointments for [dental implants](#).

The treatment has cost him £12,000 - almost half the price he had been quoted for treatment in Merseyside.

He said: "I'd already spent about £12,000 in the last nine years on various things to sort my teeth out but none of it worked.

"I wanted dental implants and I was shocked when my dentist told me the price so my wife went on the internet and that's how we found out about this.

"I first went in November, then I went back two weeks ago. The clinic is very professional and there have not been any problems.

"They pick you up from the airport and the clinic is only five minute away from the hotel. Everything ran very smoothly and there were lots of people there for treatment from all over the UK.

"The only downside is there isn't any after care because you go back home but I suppose that is the same as seeing a dentist here really. I would recommend it to anyone."

For more information on the service go to [www.kreativdental.co.uk](http://www.kreativdental.co.uk)