

NEWS RELEASE FROM
THE REGISTERED NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION

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**RNHA CALLS FOR HELP FROM THE GOVERNMENT
AND DENTAL PROFESSION IN IMPROVING THE ORAL
HEALTH OF OLDER PEOPLE IN CARE HOMES**

NHS dental services need to become more easily available to care home residents if their oral health is to be improved in future years, the Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) said today.

It wants the government and the dental profession to come up with specific plans to help care homes assess the oral health needs of newly admitted residents, maintain good oral hygiene for all their residents, and guarantee prompt and effective dental treatment when required.

Responding to guidelines published this week by NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) on the oral health of adults in care homes, RNHA chief executive officer Frank Ursell said care home managers and staff need more expert help and advice on how best to keep their residents free from tooth decay.

Mr Ursell said: "NICE recognises from research it has reviewed that some dental practitioners are unwilling to provide services in care homes, whether through a lack of time, funding or training to meet residents' particular needs. This problem must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

"The authors of the NICE guidelines agree that individuals' access to dental services to identify oral health needs is a basic right. Care home residents should not be denied a right that everyone else enjoys. Good oral health is important for general health at all ages, whether young or old. We want action to overcome the obstacles."

He added: "We are already aware from a Public Health England report last year that the older age groups looked after in care homes are from a generation who did not benefit from the availability of fluoride toothpaste when they were much younger.

"As a result, they have experienced much higher levels of dental caries during their lives than later generations born after the widespread introduction of fluoride toothpaste in the late 1970s. By the time they come into a care home they tend to have had a lot of fillings that require regular maintenance by a dentist.

“When these factors are added to their multiple health problems, you can see how maintaining good oral health presents a number of challenges that now require a concerted, multi-agency, multi-professional response.”

He concluded: “We, in the care home sector, are willing to work with NHS commissioners and the dental profession in finding the right solutions. The question is: are they ready and able to work with us and will they provide the necessary resources that help us to help our residents maintain good oral health?”

The RNHA will be contacting NHS England and the British Dental Association to discuss how best to move forward together in implementing the latest NICE guidelines.

END

Notes to editors:

1. NICE guidelines on Oral Health for Adults in Care Homes were published on 5th July 2016.

2. In December 2015 Public Health England published “What is known about the Oral Health of Older People in England and Wales”.

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