

# Supporting dental practices to adopt new ways of working during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

Most dental healthcare is delivered in primary care dental practices.

Very rapidly after the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, almost all direct patient primary dental care ceased due to concerns about the potential transmission of SARS-CoV-2.

Practices had to provide patients with reassurance and advice by phone only.

The initial focus was to follow a Government directive to manage patients with emergency or urgent dental needs using ‘advice, analgesia and antimicrobials’.

The SDCEP team was keen to support dental practices as they rapidly adapted to these new ways of working.



## About SDCEP

The Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Programme (SDCEP), part of NES’s Dental Directorate, provides user-friendly, evidence-based guidance on topics identified as priorities for oral health care.

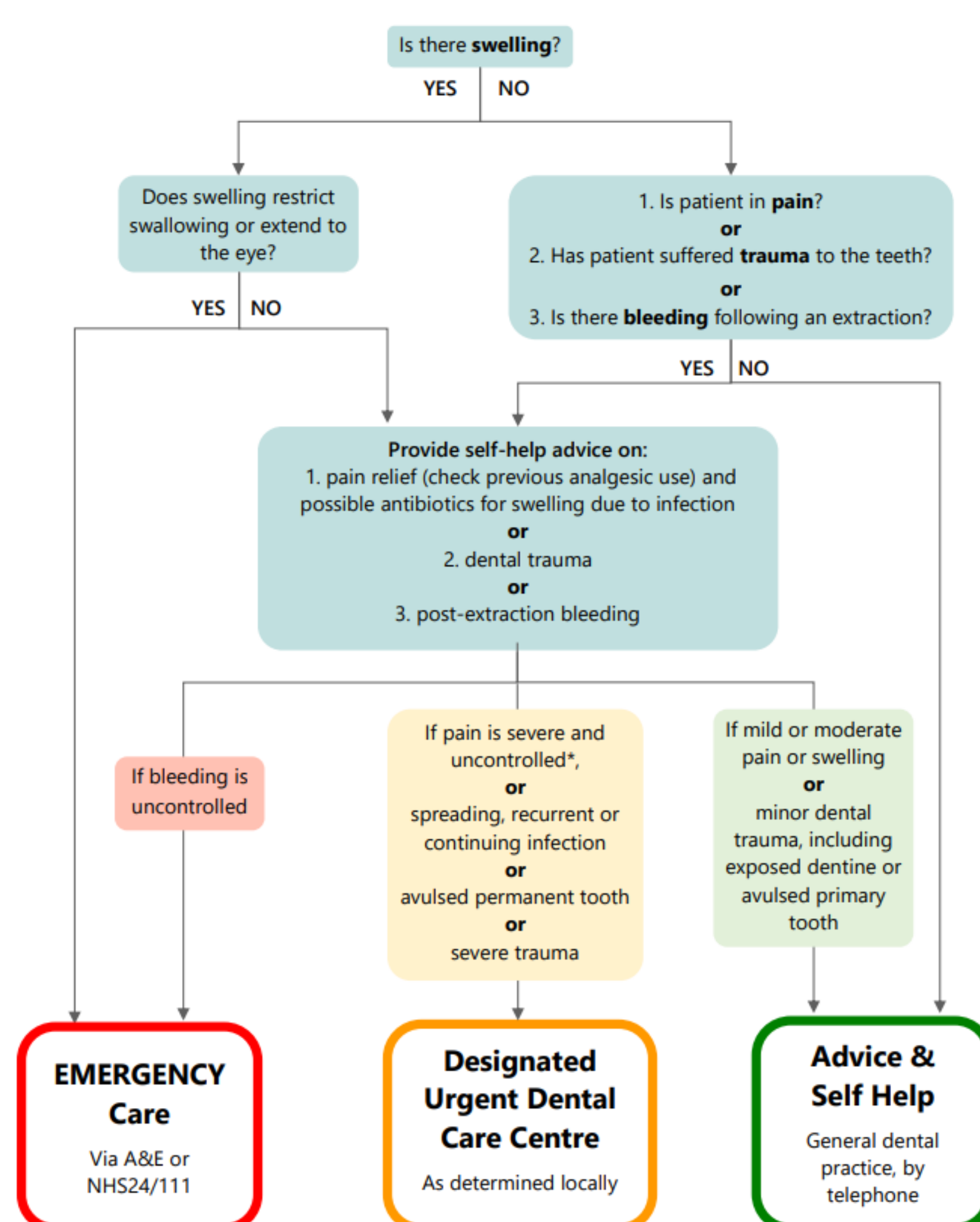
SDCEP has gained a strong reputation for using a robust methodology to deliver reliable guidance.

In 2016, SDCEP’s guidance development process was accredited by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), making SDCEP the only dental organisation with this status.

## Methods – Practice Closure

SDCEP rapidly adapted its existing *Management of Acute Dental Problems* (MADP) guidance to suit the new circumstances imposed by the pandemic.

A flowchart to inform dental triage was provided, along with advice on the remote management of commonly presenting dental problems.



Guidance on recommending and prescribing analgesics for pain and, when necessary, antibiotics for infection was also reconfigured with much needed additional detail.

A group of dental professionals was consulted online to provide feedback on the accuracy and suitability of these new resources, working within incredibly short timescales.

The information was posted on the SDCEP website ([www.sdcep.org.uk](http://www.sdcep.org.uk)) and also made available via the SDCEP *Dental Companion* app.

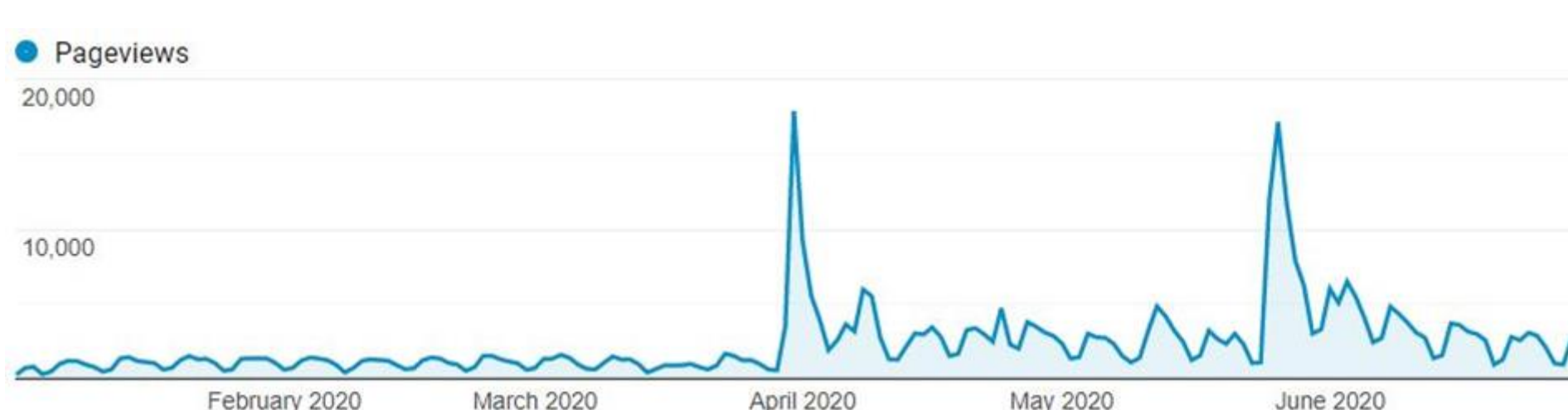


Figure shows number of webpage views on SDCEP website, with significant increases observed at publication of *Practice Closure* resources (April 2020) and *Practice Recovery* resources (May 2020).

## Methods - Practice Recovery

By mid-May 2020, it seemed likely that primary care dental practices might soon reopen.

SDCEP anticipated this and created a *Practice Recovery Toolkit* comprising a guide to reopening and other tools to help practices operate with minimal risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The toolkit included a reopening checklist which was adopted by health boards as a means of quality-assuring practices before patients could attend.

Surveys and focus groups of patients and dental professionals provided invaluable insight into the challenges being encountered.

## Results and Discussion

The amended MADP guidance was provided within one week of practice closures and accessed over 20,000 times in the first five days.

The drugs guidance followed shortly afterwards and was also highly accessed.

The *Practice Recovery Toolkit* was delivered in time for practice reopening.

Demand for the SDCEP resources was high with ~320,000 webpage views in the three months post-lockdown, >300% higher than the equivalent period in 2019.

These resources informed the content of a series of very well-attended practice recovery webinars delivered by colleagues in NES’s Dental Directorate.

## Conclusion

Identifying needs, adapting existing resources and willingness to collaborate enabled timely delivery of support for dental services to adjust to new ways of working during the pandemic.