View From The Mouth

The views of dental professionals are frequently read and talked about. But it’s rarer to get an opinion about treatment from the patient themself. So what is NHS dentistry like from the perspective of the patient on the dental couch? Yvonne Gordon talks to a patient, who was treated at an NHS dental surgery as a new patient.

South-west London resident, Anselm Mcleod, 38, had avoided dentists for some time after becoming dissatisfied with private treatment. After getting acute toothache from several dislodged fillings, he rang an NHS dentist and was offered an appointment the day after.

He says: ‘I needed to visit the dentist quite urgently, because I hadn’t had a check-up for over a year, because private treatment had put me off.

‘I changed from private to NHS, partly because of cost. Previously I went to a dental practice for seven years, which gave patients NHS or private treatment. Prices shot up when the surgery went completely private two years ago. But the service was no better, though I was paying more.

Anselm chose an NHS dentist from the PCT website. Although there were no NHS dentists in ‘posh’ Clapham Common, there were many in nearby Brixton.

He says: ‘The NHS treatment I received was second to none. The dentist was very thorough, professional, caring and honest. Each session lasted 25-30 minutes. He took the time to do a good job.

Anselm’s treatment spanned four visits over one month and he felt all the treatment he received was really necessary, with appointments spaced out according to the dentist’s advice. He adds: ‘After I completed the course of antibiotics he prescribed, he asked me a series of detailed questions to check my discomfort level, before deciding on further treatment.

‘He did an excellent job technically and his patient care and consideration could not have been better.

Anselm also thinks the amount he was charged was ‘incredibly reasonable’ at under £45 for the whole lot. ‘It was re-assuring that the NHS dental price tariff is clear and carefully explained to me in advance.’ The dentist also gave him a full ‘hygienist’ treatment, privately, in addition to NHS scaling and polishing.

Anselm comments: ‘It was good to have the dentist himself carrying out the ‘hygienist’ treatment. He said that the NHS regards such treatment as ‘cosmetic’. But I cannot understand why such a basic, preventative measure, is not included in NHS dentistry.’

He concludes: ‘I would like to get across that I have read much negative press about NHS dentistry, specifically about confusion over costs and inappropriate, rushed treatment.

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[1] The result of a study carried out by Professor Dr. Mehl (Zurich University, 2008): measuring depth accuracy of up to 19 μm.