

Direct Access Practice Protocol

What is this protocol and who is it for?

This protocol is to provide direction and guidance for patients and the dental team. It is a working document which aims to provide consistent and accurate information about the Direct Access (DA) services on offer, for the benefit of patient care and the development of efficient admin workflows. The whole dental team should understand what DA involves and how it is delivered so that they can educate patients and work effectively as part of a team when referrals to a dentist are required. Moreover, Direct Access patients should be directed to this protocol before their dental appointment as part of the informed consent process.

What is Direct Access?

A dental hygienist can either work under the dentist's prescription, or under DA arrangements. Working under a dentist's prescription is where the patient has had an examination with the dentist first and has been referred to the hygienist for treatment. The hygienist then follows a treatment plan that was created by the dentist. DA arrangements allow patients to directly access some services of a dental hygienist without seeing the dentist first.

What if a patient has already had a DA appointment at Indigo Dental previously?

If a patient has already had a DA appointment at Indigo Dental, but has still never registered with one of our dentists for an examination, then their next hygiene appointment will also be under DA arrangements. This is because there is still no written treatment plan from a dentist, and the patient is accessing the hygienist's services directly in the same way they did last time.

Why is there a different fee for patients who are registered with a dentist at our practice, compared to those who are not?

If the hygienist is not working under the prescription of a dentist, then they have more responsibility for the patient's care. This means there are further duties for the hygienist to carry out during a DA appointment. Hygienists working under DA are also required to have valid insurance arrangements in place to account for this responsibility. The fees set by the practice represent these extra duties and insurance arrangements.

What is Indigo Dental offering under DA arrangements with the Dental Hygienist (DH)?

Any dental professional or dental practice providing DA can choose to limit their practice to certain treatments. The DH has worked with the practice to decide what treatments they wish to provide and how this provision will work within the team. The DH has taken into consideration what treatments they enjoy, and are confident and competent to undertake. The demographic of the practice has also been regarded.

It has been agreed that the DH will see DA patients to:

- Ensure valid consent is obtained from the patient and evidenced by signing the relevant

consent forms

- Gather thorough information including details of the patient's General Dental Practitioner (GDP) if applicable; medical, social, and dental histories; and the patient's oral concerns
- Provide a clinical examination within their scope of practice and competence, including a thorough extra-oral and intra-oral examination, and oral cancer soft tissue screening
- Record baseline dental charting on the computerised software
- Share the findings of their examination with the patient
- Provide tailored oral hygiene instruction
- Carry out the hygiene treatment that the patient has booked in for (Professional Mechanical Plaque Removal and/or polishing and/or stain removal)
- Advise the patient of a recall period tailored to their oral health and associated risks, as per NICE recall guidelines

When might a referral be indicated, and what happens next?

A referral may be indicated for the interests of the patient's health, for things outside the DH's scope of practice, or due to any uncertainties. If a referral to a dentist is necessary, the Hygienist will explain the reasons for this and seek the patient's consent to make the referral; This is all to be recorded in the patient's notes.

How does the referral process work if the patient has their own GDP?

If the DA patient is registered with a GDP outside of Indigo Dental, then an external referral back to their own GDP will be made by the treatment co-ordinator. External referrals are to include relevant clinical information from the patient's records, details of what has been done at the appointment today, and the reason for the referral. All external referrals are to be made following the practice's Data Processing Agreement, along with policies M 293, M 216, M233-DPT, M 217C, and M217E.

How does the referral process work if the patient does not have their own GDP?

If the patient is not registered with a GDP then an internal referral to one of Indigo Dental's dentists will be made by the DH. The DH will create an estimate for an examination with the dentist and discuss this with the patient. If the patient decides to register with a dentist at Indigo Dental, the DH would then continue any further treatment for that patient under the prescription of the dentist.

What happens if the patient declines the referral to a dentist?

If a patient refuses a referral to a dentist, the possible consequences of this should be explained to them and a note of the discussion made in the patient's records. An estimate should still be signed to show that this discussion has taken place, and to show that the patient understands the DH's recommendation.