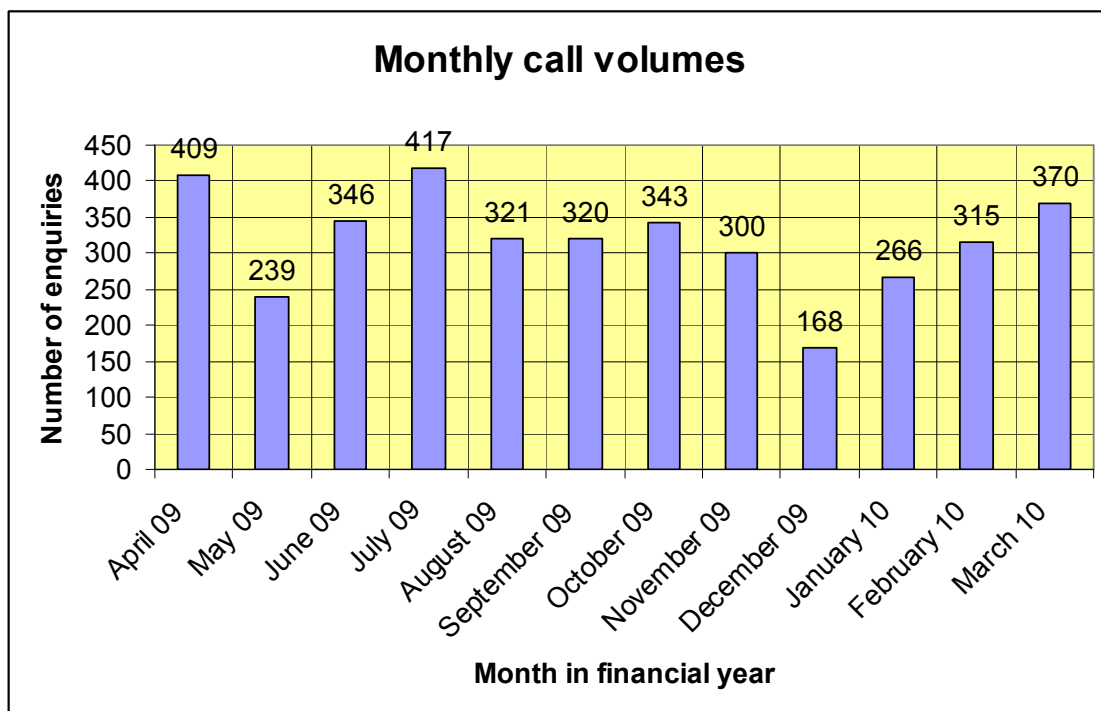


**PALS Annual Report for 2009/10**

NHS Berkshire West PALS provides an information and advice service for all patients, families and carers living in Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire. PALS provides informal, confidential help and advice on matters appertaining to NHS primary health care services.

**Overview**

Over the course of 2009/10 PALS received 3814 enquiries. The average number of enquiries received per month was 318. Our busiest months were April and July. This year we experienced less calls than usual in December and January. There was a correlation between call volumes and the large amount of local snowfall during these months.



During the financial year PALS dealt with 765 enquiries from West Berkshire residents which amounted to 20% of the total enquiries dealt with by PALS. There is a similarity with the Wokingham area, whose residents constitute 18% of the total number of service users. Reading residents continue to be the major users of the service and their enquiries constitute 46% of the total volume of enquiries.

### Frequently asked questions

Our most frequently asked questions are “Can you help me to find a dentist?” and “Can you help me to register with a GP?”

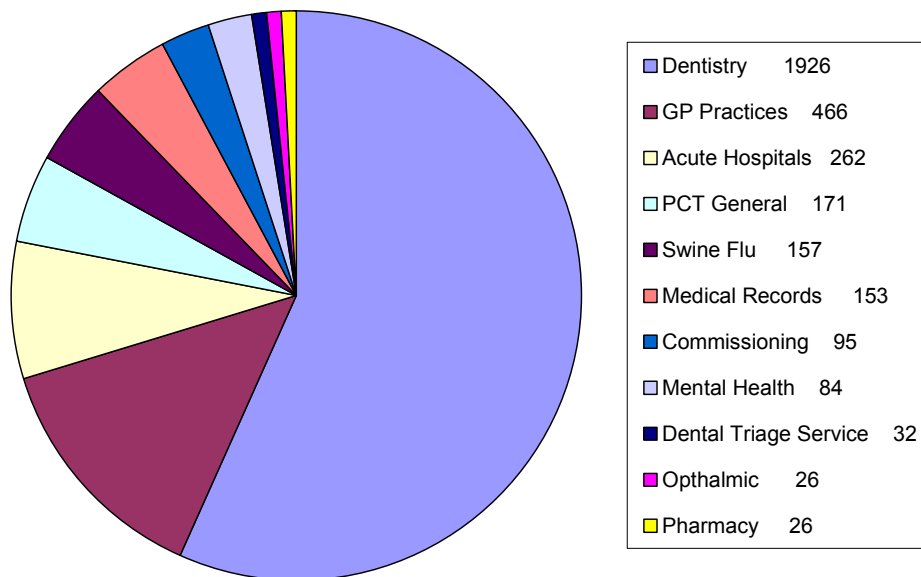
During 2009/10 PALS helped 1547 patients to locate a local dentist so that they could receive NHS treatment. This accounted for 40% of all PALS enquiries. 337 of these enquiries were from West Berkshire residents.

West Berkshire has a good geographical spread of NHS dental practices which means that the area is well served. There are also a series of Community Dental Clinics and an on-call rota offering emergency intervention for patients who need urgent treatment and those with complex needs

In order to make this information more accessible the PCT began displaying on its website a list of all NHS dentists currently accepting new patients. This information is updated monthly. It is also distributed to all GPs and Pharmacies. A series of supermarket Roadshows is being rolled out. The aim of these is to signpost patients to local dentists. The feedback that we have received so far is overwhelmingly positive.

### Most popular areas of enquiry

The pie chart below shows the top ten most popular areas of enquiry for all of our residents. This is mirrored by West Berkshire residents who have also identified the same top 6 most popular areas of enquiry. Enquiries can range from simple requests for telephone numbers and information about where to find services or how they work, right through to concerns about access, waiting times and treatment.



It is possible to examine the enquiries appertaining to West Berkshire residents. The most popular areas of enquiry were;

#### Dentistry

404 enquiries from West Berkshire residents related to NHS Dentistry.

- 353 information requests for details of dentists in the area
- 18 enquiries regarding access e.g. disabled access and flexibility of access i.e. opening times.
- 9 enquiries regarding care and treatment
- 7 enquiries regarding financial charging

There were 17 additional enquiries which spanned a wide range of issues.

#### Acute (Hospital) Services

72 enquiries received from West Berkshire residents related to hospital care provided by the following Trusts;

- Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading (38)
- West Berkshire Community Hospital (17)
- North Hampshire Hospital (1)
- Nuffield Orthopaedic (4)
- John Radcliffe (2)
- Hospital not specified by patient (10)

Of these Acute Services enquiries the majority (17) were concerns expressed about the waiting times for treatment. We received 13 requests for general information such as average waiting times, location, etc. 11 concerns were regarding access and 10 regarding booking appointments. The remainder were wide ranging from discharge arrangements to cleanliness.

#### General Practice

63 enquiries were received from West Berkshire residents.

- 22 enquiries regarding access e.g. opening times, availability of extended hours, disabled access
- 16 information requests for assistance in registering with a GP
- 11 concerns expressed about care and treatment

The remaining 14 enquiries were a range of enquiries from medical records through to cleanliness.

#### **PALS involvement in national programmes**

During 2009/10 PALS was involved in assisting patients during the local roll out of two key national programmes;

- Swine Flu – vaccination programme and treatment centres

PALS dealt with concerns from patients and 'Flu Friends' regarding treatment of Swine Flu. In the main these were from people wishing to identify their local Anti-Viral Collection Point. PALS was responsible for co-ordinating the local

pharmacy delivery service for Flu Friendless patients. PALS also received calls from patients and parents regarding the rollout of vaccination programmes. PALS helped 30 West Berkshire residents with queries regarding Swine Flu.

- Summary Care Records.

PALS received concerns and questions about the rollout of the Summary Care Record scheme. PALS provided a local support service to Berkshire West patients who had questions about how the scheme would work and posted forms to those patients wishing to opt out. PALS helped 39 West Berkshire residents with queries regarding Summary Care Records.

### **What has changed?**

As well as resolving individual patient's concerns, PALS use patient feedback to identify trends or issues that have affected significant numbers of patients. This patient feedback is cascaded to key decision-makers in the organisation and is used to inform PCT investment and service development.

A good example of this is dentistry. In 2009/10 Dentistry accounted for 50% of all PALS enquiries. In response to patient feedback funding has been agreed for increased dental capacity as follows;

- Three new dental surgeries opened in April and May 2009 in Shinfield, Twyford and Newbury.
- NHS Berkshire West invested more money in existing contracts with dental practices to ensure more dental appointments can be offered to patients living in Berkshire West.
- Despite increased investment there are still relatively low levels of access in the Wokingham area and the rural parts of West Berkshire. NHS Berkshire West intends to invest more money in current and new NHS dental practices to increase the levels of NHS provision in these areas during 2010/11.
- Patient feedback has highlighted that some patients are experiencing difficulty in obtaining NHS Endodontic (Root Canal Treatment). This is often due to the complex nature of the clinical procedure. NHS Berkshire West is currently working with neighbouring PCT's to develop a local specialist service. In the meantime a process has been established for individual requests for treatment to be considered for NHS funding.

### **Looking ahead to 2010 / 11**

As part of the World Class Commissioning agenda, PALS will continue to play a key role in putting patient feedback at the heart of the PCT's commissioning decisions. WCC Competency (Level 3) 3 states that the PCT should;

*“Proactively build continuous and meaningful engagement with the public and patients to shape services and improve health. The PCT demonstrates how patient feedback (survey data, patient complaints and PALS) have driven commissioning decisions.”*

PALS continues provide feedback to the PCT's Board, Integrated Governance Committee and a plethora of Commissioning and Provider Services working groups which have a responsibility to ensure that patient feedback is listened to and acted upon.

**Jo Cozens**  
**PALS Manager**  
**NHS Berkshire West**  
**26<sup>th</sup> April 2010**