

Why trip to dentist took all day

MY local MP was interviewed recently about the lack of NHS dentists on the Isle of Wight.

The only dentists available for island NHS patients are in Southampton, Portsmouth or Southsea. Isle of Wight MP Andrew Turner said he thought a trip from Freshwater would take half a day.

I didn't think that was realistic, so I 'borrowed' some nieces and a nephew and we pretended to be 'visiting the dentist' on the mainland to check it out.

The trip took us a total of six hours and six minutes and cost us the best part of £100. To his credit, Mr Turner recognised this and used the account that follows in a House of Commons speech on the issue in September, in which he urged the government to find a solution to the problem.

Many families needing an NHS dentist live on modest means and may not have a car, so I, my six and 11-year-old nieces and nine-year-old nephew started our journey one Saturday on the 7B bus from Freshwater.

The 10.14 bus arrived on time,

the BIG issue



by Alison Holbrook, assistant social responsibility adviser

Each month, columnists in The Big Issue challenge us with moral, spiritual or social concerns. This month we challenge claims about the accessibility of NHS dentists

and we bought Day Rover tickets. The children were excited about going on the top deck, but by Brighstone they were feeling the effects of the hilly route. Although we didn't use it, I was glad we brought a sick bag!

We got to Ryde after an hour and 21 minutes and we hadn't left the island! I had chosen to take the hovercraft to Southsea because it was quicker, and the train up Ryde Pier left at 11.35, with the bus getting in at 11.34.

The hovercraft left at 11.52 and we arrived in Southsea at 12.05, map in hand, to walk to the surgery. It took us more than 20 min-

utes to walk there and we weren't sure if we were at the right end of the long street it was on. We arrived outside the surgery door at 12.30pm.

We tried to work out how long we would be in there if this was our first appointment. There would be forms to fill in, payments to be made and dental inspections to carry out.

We thought half an hour would be right, so at 1pm we went to get something to eat at KFC. A picnic would have been better and cheaper, but would have added to our struggle with bags on the bus.

After lunch, we walked back to

the hover terminal to make sure of our place on the 2.15pm crossing, which was packed.

As the children were tired, I agreed to take them home to Brading, but disembarkation from the hovercraft was delayed because of the number of passengers and special equipment being moved into place for a disabled passenger.

We had one minute to get the bus, but missed it. Instead we got on the 7A to Freshwater, which was revving up to leave at 2.45pm.

It took even longer to get back (one hour and 35 minutes), and my youngest mislaid her fleece when we moved seats during the journey (some kind person handed it in at Newport bus station).

So our visit to the dentist took a whole day. It also took a great deal of planning and was exhausting for myself and the children. The grand total of the travel costs, registration fee and routine adult dental inspection was £92.82.



What nine-year-old Harry Loman thought of his trip, as quoted in the House of Commons

The other thing to take into account is that many island schools object to pupils being taken out of school for dental appointments, which they consider should be made after school hours! We are storing up massive problems if, because of inaccessible dental care, we neglect the health of our young people.

• Andrew Turner MP's speech to the House of Commons about NHS dentists on the Isle of Wight can be read at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/cm030909/halltext/30909h03.htm>

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