



Council of New South Wales

Media Release



Health

2 July, 2015

NSW HEALTH AND DENTAL COUNCIL OF NSW WARN OF INFECTION CONTROL BREACHES AT FOUR DENTAL SURGERIES

NSW Health is recommending that patients who have had invasive dental procedures at four private Sydney clinics over the past several years see their GP for testing for blood-borne viruses.

The advice follows a Dental Council of NSW and NSW Health investigation of the clinics, which has identified multiple infection control breaches have likely occurred over an extended period.

The four surgeries are The Gentle Dentist, located in both Campsie and the Sydney Central Business District (CBD), and Dr Robert Craige Starkenburg's clinics at Bondi Junction and Surry Hills.

The Dental Council of NSW has advised that subsequent to regulatory action, further inspections have been carried out and there have been improvements at The Gentle Dentist in the infection control procedures and practices consistent with the relevant National Guidelines.

Dr Starkenburg's practice has been closed.

NSW Health's Blood Borne Viruses Advisory Panel has reviewed the circumstances at the dental practices, including detailed analyses of infection control methods applied. It concluded that there was a potential risk of transmission of the blood-borne viruses hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV to patients who have had invasive procedures at the clinics.

The risk of transmission of a blood-borne virus to any individual patient during the periods of concern is low.

To date, there have been no cases of blood borne virus infection identified that are known to be associated with any of these dental practices.

Invasive procedures are those that involve penetration of the gums with instruments that may not have been properly sterilised between patients.

As hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV infections are often silent for many years, NSW Health recommends that former patients of the dental practices who have had invasive procedures see their GP for testing of these conditions.

Effective treatments are now available for all three infections to prevent long-term health effects and transmission to others.

The Gentle Dentist has operated its Campsie practice since 2005 and the CBD practice since 2008. During this time, about 40,000 patients have visited the clinics. Of these, 11,251 patients had an invasive procedure that may have put them at low risk of a blood-borne virus infection.

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The Gentle Dentist has been able to provide contact details for most of its patients, and correspondence has been sent to those patients identified at risk.

Dr Starkenburg practised at 108 Bronte Road at Bondi Junction between 2005 and 2014 and at 75 Fitzroy Street in Surry Hills from 1990 to 2007. About 800 people are anticipated to have attended one or both of these dental surgeries during these years.

However, due to inadequate patient records at Dr Starkenburg's surgeries, it is not possible to determine which patients had invasive procedures.

It is recommended all of Dr Starkenburg's patients be tested for blood-borne virus infections as a precaution and correspondence has been sent to all patients for which there are contact details.

All dental practitioners are required to comply with the codes, guidelines and standards set by the Dental Board of Australia, including its '*Guidelines on infection control*'.

The Dental Council processes for dealing with complaints are set out in the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (NSW)* (the National Law (NSW)). The Council works in partnership with the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC). The Council and the HCCC jointly assess all complaints received in order to determine the appropriate action.

The Dental Council of NSW also has interim immediate action powers under section 150 of the National Law (NSW) to suspend or impose conditions on a dental practitioner's registration, including while a matter is under investigation, if it is appropriate to do so in order to protect the health and safety of the public.

The Dental Council of NSW has suspended the registration of the Director of the Gentle Dentist, Dr Samson Sing Chan, using its powers to take immediate action to protect the public, as well as four other dentists who had worked at The Gentle Dentist.

A further six dentists from The Gentle Dentist have had conditions imposed on their registration.

Dr Starkenburg was suspended from practice on 2 December 2014.

The Dental Council of NSW has referred Dr Starkenburg and practitioners at The Gentle Dentist who have had action taken against them to the HCCC for investigation.

NSW Health has established a public information line staffed to assist patients of either practice who may have questions on 1800 610 344.

Please refer to the NSW Health website for further information on this matter.

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/dental-practices.aspx>

FAQs: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/dental-practices-faq.aspx>

For information on blood-borne viruses

see: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Hepatitis_B.aspx

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Hepatitis_C.aspx

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/HIV_AIDS.aspx

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