

Directors of Dentistry

06 May 2025

CDO Letter 2025(3) - Atlas of Variation

Dear Colleague,

I would like to take this opportunity to advise you that the Scottish Atlas of Healthcare Variation has been published by Public Health Scotland today, and that this includes data on hospital paediatric dental extractions under general anaesthesia.

The Atlas aims to highlight geographical variation in the provision of health services and associated outcomes, with the view to facilitating discussion on how and why unwarranted variation exists and how it can be successfully managed and/or mitigated.

As you will be aware, the topic of paediatric general anaesthesia (GA) for dental extractions has been a topic of discussion in the Director of Dentistry forum for some time. This is primarily due to the length of waiting times experienced by some children in Scotland as well as the difficulties shared by some of you in accessing theatre sessions to reduce waiting lists.

While the Atlas publication does not include waiting times data – as this is already published by Public Health Scotland – it does include details of numbers of procedures by patient NHS Board residence and SIMD fifths, and will therefore give us a better understanding of referral caseloads and support the identification of actions to reduce these over the longer-term.

We acknowledge that there will always be a level of need for children to be referred to secondary care for extractions under GA, as well as a degree of variation due to the complexity of health systems and differing patient demographics. However, now that paediatric GA dental extraction data are included in the publication, we are keen to begin work with you to understand and reduce unwarranted variation across Scotland as much as possible through focused review and discussion. It is my hope that this will allow us to develop alternative patient care pathways which provide benefit for the system and, crucially, for patients e.g. through both better management of clinical needs in primary care settings, and enhanced preventive action to negate the need for surgical intervention. I would therefore ask you to look at the data for your area in order to familiarise yourself with the key

points, including variation by socioeconomic deprivation, with a view to us beginning this conversation in due course.

These Healthcare Atlas's are intended as a starting point for a renewed focus on action at different levels and I will write to you again in the coming weeks to seek your views on the Atlas and to establish if it has been helpful to you and colleagues, in identifying and tackling unwarranted variation.

I hope you find access to these official statistics helpful, and PHS colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Yours Sincerely,



Tom Ferris
Chief Dental Officer