

The Impact of COVID-19 on Odontogenic Admissions to OMFS 2019-Present

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Objectives:

The aim of this research was to assess the number of admissions for odontogenic infection before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to assess the impact both directly and indirectly on the limited access to dental care reported by patients.

Methods:

This research has been captured within the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital within the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) Department which also accepts referrals from the surrounding spoke hospitals. Data has been collected retrospectively from OMFS handovers for patients admitted for dental infections from 01/01/2019 to 30/09/2023 totalling 57 months. Data captured included: patient age, sex, surgical intervention and the duration of stay in hospital.

Results:

A total number of 774 patients were admitted under OMFS for dental infection between 01/01/2019 and 30/09/2023. Pre-pandemic in 2019; 154 patients admitted, rising to 187 admissions in 2022. The busiest month was December 2021 with a total number of 29 patients admitted. The average monthly admissions in 2019 was 12.75 patients, whereas 2022 and 2023 averaged 15.5 patients. The average age of patients in 2019 was 40.5 years (SD = 19.1 years) whereas in 2023 this was 43.9 years (SD = 20.2years). The percentage of male patients has increased since the pandemic from 44% in 2019 to 51% in 2023. The percentage of patients requiring surgery in 2019 was 95.4% and in 2022 this was 98.4%. The average duration of stay in 2019 was 2.0 days and is 2.6 days on average for 2021 and 2022.

Conclusion:

The frequency of dental infections has increased post the COVID-19 pandemic. The severity of dental infection measured by need for surgical intervention and duration of overall stay has also increased.

This data emphasises the need to recruit dental practitioners, to improve the primary care services and reduce the pressure on emergency hospital services.