



Consumer Oral Health Survey Results 2022

 **Denplan**
Part of Simplyhealth

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For more information about this report, please contact Denplan's media team on pr@simplyhealth.co.uk or telephone **0344 579 2489**

Welcome to the Denplan Consumer Oral Health Survey Results

At Denplan, part of Simplyhealth, we know the benefits that come from healthier mouths and gums. As the UK's leading payment plan provider, we work with more than 6,600 member dentists who care for around 1.3 million patients across the UK. Together we encourage regular dental attendance, as we know the positive impact it brings to the nation's oral (and overall) health.

After a break in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are back with our comprehensive annual consumer survey. We conduct this to gain insights into the nation's oral health, enabling us to keep ahead of dental trends and provide customers with the support they need to access oral healthcare and advice.

As always, we asked UK adults about dental attendance and oral health habits. This year, our research highlights the impact of the pandemic with some shocking statistics about how the pandemic continues to influence consumers' dental and overall health. Other key themes include children's oral health, what consumers value from their dental practice, and their understanding of the links between their oral health and general health.

To support the data, we've provided insights from our Clinical Director, Dr Catherine Rutland and Head Dental Officer, Louis Mackenzie. If you'd like to know more about the research or want a quote from one of our dental experts, please do get in touch.

Survey data of 5,060 adults conducted by DeltaPoll on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 8-11 October 2021.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (18+).



Who visits the dentist?

Regular dental visits are an essential part of maintaining good oral health, and dentists will advise how often a patient should visit according to their individual oral health needs. However, everyone* should ensure that they visit their dentist at least once every two years.

Our research shows that **20%** of adults are not visiting a dentist regularly (less than every two years), with almost **one in three** never having had a scale and polish with a hygienist.

There is a clear link with more regular attendance when patients are on a dental payment plan, so to provide further insight into the financial factors, we've also looked at how patients currently pay for their dental care.

How often do we visit the dentist?

- 80%** of adults visited the dentist regularly pre-pandemic (at least once every two years)
- 81%** of adults on a dental payment plan (such as Denplan) visit every six months - this is nearly double compared to NHS (**42%**)
- 54%** of pay as you go adults visit every 6 months
- 10%** of adults only visit the dentist when in pain
- 6%** of adults **never** visit the dentist

What about visits to the wider dental team?

- 49%** of adults visited a hygienist for a scale and polish at least once a year
- 28%** of adults never see a hygienist

Why don't some people visit regularly?

- 31%** fear of dental treatment/pain
- 29%** say they can't afford it
- 30%** only go if they need treatment
- 17%** can't find/access an NHS dentist

How do people pay for their dental care?

- 78%** of patients are NHS patients
- 18%** of adults are private patients
- 59%** of NHS patients pay as they go
- 5%** of NHS patients reclaim their costs via a cash plan or insurance plan
- 62%** of private patients pay as they go
- 25%** of private patients have a monthly dental payment plan (such as Denplan)

Did you know?

54%

More than half of adults that regularly visit a dentist who don't already have a monthly payment plan **would consider buying a dental payment plan** to help them budget for the cost of dental care. Adults aged 25-44 are most likely to do this.

61%

3 in 5 NHS patients would **consider paying for private dental care**, with over a third of them (**36%**) not having been open to this in the past.

84%

More than four in five adults **recognise the importance of prevention**; **84%** say regular dental visits play a vital role in maintaining good oral health.¹

Geographic attendance

Adults in the North of England** attend the dentist most regularly, and adults in London are the least regular attenders. There was no noticeable difference between the three nations of the UK in terms of UK Adults attending the dentist at least every two years: England **79%**, Wales **81%** and Scotland **82%**.

Dental pain and emergency appointments

- 19%** nearly **one in five** adults have had to take time off work due to dental pain
- 47%** of adults have had an emergency appointment for themselves or their dependents in the last 12 months

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While it's great that the majority of adults visit the dentist regularly, I'm concerned to see nearly a quarter of people going less than every two years and nearly one in five either never visit or only go when in pain. We are also seeing that those people who are less affluent visit less regularly meaning the oral health of certain parts of society will decline as a result.

As professionals we know the importance of prevention in oral health. With that in mind it's worrying that thirty percent of adults only visit a dentist when needing treatment – often meaning irreversible damage has already been done. As dental teams, we work together on a preventive approach, and with nearly a third of adults never having seen a hygienist, there is an opportunity to help patients understand the value in accessing the wider dental team to support the health of their gums and teeth which may help them avoid more complex treatment needs in the future.

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Denplan

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¹ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+), conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 6-8 October 2021
* Generally applicable to low-risk dental patients ** North East, North West and Yorkshire

Patient values, affordability and satisfaction

When patients are choosing a dentist or dental practice, it could be easy to assume that they base their decision largely on location or financial factors. Considerations when choosing a dentist are actually wide-ranging. Our research also shows that satisfaction with dental care and treatment rises for private patients and budgeting options for dental care are in demand for UK adults.

What's most important to patients when choosing a dentist or dental practice?

- 92%** the dentist will ensure the health of my teeth and gums
- 91%** trust in my dentist
- 91%** quality of care
- 90%** confidence that the surgery is sterile and hygienic
- 90%** good patient communications
- 90%** being seen quickly in an emergency
- 86%** being seen on time for my appointments
- 86%** convenience of appointment times
- 84%** value for money
- 57%** they offer a range of payment options

Trust, quality of care and a hygienic/sterile environment are most important when choosing a dentist or dental practice

79% of adults aged 55 years and over are satisfied with the dental care they receive

75% of adults who visit the dentist regularly (at least once every two years) are satisfied with the dental care and treatment they receive. This rises to **83%** for private patients

85% of adults on a dental payment plan (such as Denplan) are satisfied with the dental care they receive

Affordability - and do patients want to budget?

- 29%** of adults who don't attend the dentist regularly say that they can't afford to go to the dentist regularly
- 12%** of adults who don't attend the dentist regularly don't have routine dental check-ups as they don't think it's worth the money it costs
- 54%** of regular attenders would consider a payment plan to help budget for cost of their dental treatment
- 49%** of adults on a monthly payment plan (like Denplan) chose it to help them spread the costs

Our data trends show that confidence in surgery hygiene, the dentist ensuring the health of their teeth and gums, and trust in their dentist continue to be the most important factors to patients for a seventh year. With trust and quality of care rated significantly higher by private patients.

Interestingly, whether a dentist offers a range of payment options is ranked ten percent more important in the reasons why to choose a dentist since our last survey in 2019. With a significant number of adults not having check-ups as they don't think it's worth the money - there is a real opportunity for practices to flag their various payment options.

At Denplan, we'll never tire of taking action to help people live their best and healthiest lives. That's why we make our dental plans affordable - so that people regularly visit their dentist and are able to budget for their oral healthcare needs.

Louis Mackenzie,
Head Dental Officer, Denplan



Pandemic impact overall - attendance and oral health

With a gap since our 2019 survey, our research has been able to show clear pre-pandemic to post-lockdown behaviours. The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative consequences for more than one in three patients, largely but not exclusively, because of postponed or delayed dental appointments.

Our further research¹ has also given valuable insight into how lockdown changed people's habits affecting their oral health.

Pandemic impact on dental visits

44% of adults visited the dentist every 6 months pre-pandemic

33% claim to have last seen a dentist for a check-up in the last 6 months

36% say that the pandemic has negatively impacted their oral health

Of the people who feel the pandemic has negatively impacted their oral health:

50% have had appointments delayed

49% have been unable to book any dental appointments with their dentist

23% were worried about contracting COVID-19 if attending

17% say as a result of the pandemic they can no longer afford to go to the dentist, with their financial circumstances changing

Did you know?

62% of private patients said the pandemic had no impact to their oral health compared to **54%** of NHS patients

When we asked UK adults about whether they needed emergency treatment in the last year:

53% have had appointments delayed

31% didn't need any

9% went to the dental emergency hub

6% went to A&E

5% administered self-care

Pandemic habits affecting our oral health

19% of the **36%** who say the pandemic negatively impacted their oral health say they have been eating more sugary foods during the pandemic

7% of adults said they smoke more, with **2%** having started smoking in the pandemic¹

17% drink more alcohol¹

What lies ahead?

29% say that in light of the coronavirus, they now value their health and are more likely to visit their dentist as a result¹

24% have missed seeing their dentist in person¹

10% say that their reliance on their dental team has increased¹



The pandemic continues to have a detrimental impact on our overall health – our oral health included. Seeing that nearly one in three adults say it has negatively impacted their teeth is very worrying.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed – and in many cases exacerbated – the issues facing mixed and private dental practices across the UK. Despite nearly two years of practice teams doing tremendous work in meeting patient care needs and carrying out treatments under challenging circumstances, access is still hard. Even more so for NHS patients, who in our research show to be attending less regularly than private patients in the last 12 months.

Looking ahead, financial pressures because of the pandemic, as well as patients being out of routine of regular attendance will all have an impact. But we are also seeing patients valuing their health more in light of the pandemic, with nearly a third saying they are more likely to visit the dentist as a result. This opens a real opportunity for practices to reach out to these patient groups.

Dr Catherine Rutland,
Clinical Director, Denplan



¹ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+), conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 6-8 October 2021

The nation's oral health habits

The roots of good oral health run much deeper than just a winning smile: the way we breathe, talk, eat and socialise; the jobs we apply for; the confidence we have in ourselves; and our relationships with others. Choosing the right path when it comes to lifestyle and diet is reflected not just in our general health, but also in our mouths, teeth and gums.

But having a healthy mouth isn't always easy. Barriers such as lack of time, fear of the dentist and lack of knowledge about good oral hygiene such as why people don't clean between their teeth are all revealed in the results of our research.

Brushing habits

- 71%** of adults brush teeth twice a day or more
- 26%** of adults only brush once or less a day – this is higher in men (**31%**) than women (**22%**)
- 51%** of adults brush the recommended 2 minutes
- 27%** of adults only brush for 1 minute
- 5%** of adults brush for 30 seconds or less
- 74%** of adults rinse after brushing (39% with water, 24% with mouthwash, 11% with both)

“It's worth noting that rinsing with water or mouthwash is not recommended after brushing because it washes away the concentrated fluoride in the toothpaste, it's interesting to see that such a high proportion of people still do so.”

Louis MacKenzie, Head Dental Officer, Denplan

Flossing* habits

- 22%** of adults say they floss once a day
- 20%** of adults say they never floss
- 19%** of adults that floss less than once a day say it's because it's boring
- 19%** say they only floss when something is stuck between their teeth

*Flossing refers to all methods of cleaning between teeth including string floss, floss harps, interdental brushes and air flossers)

Did you know?

- 9%** of adults admit to sharing a toothbrush with another person - rising to **20%** in 25-34 year olds
- 47%** of adults only change their toothbrush every 3 months
- 25%** of adults only change their toothbrush every 6 months

Our concerns about our oral health

- 30%** of adults fear tooth loss
- 36%** of adults are worried about gum disease
- 37%** of adults are concerned about tooth decay

Oral health impact and self confidence

- 23%** of adults say they don't like to show their teeth when they smile
- 14%** of adults say they have low self-esteem because of their teeth
- 18%** of adults say they are most concerned about the whiteness of their teeth when it comes to their oral health
- 10%** of adults worry about how their teeth look in photos
- 8%** of adults avoid socialising because of the way their teeth look/feel

85%
of adults agree that the better they look after their teeth and gums, the better chance they have of avoiding costly and invasive dental treatment in the future

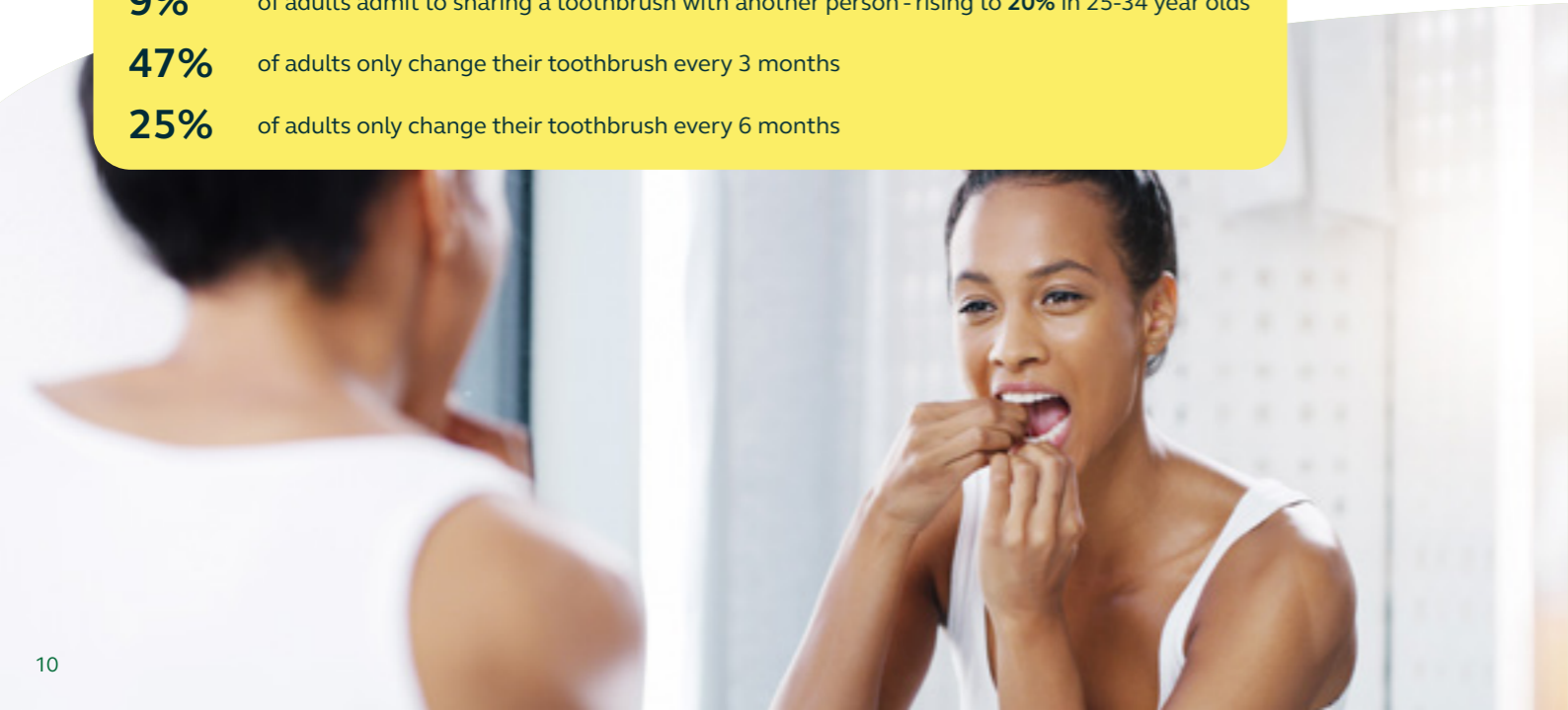
88%
of adults agree that good oral health habits must be taught in childhood to improve oral health for life

“As dental professionals we know the detrimental impact of patients not maintaining a good oral health routine. Our research is sadly showing a ten percent drop, compared to our 2019 survey, in both adults who brush twice a day, but also for the recommended two minutes. Nearly a quarter indicate they don't floss, as it makes their gums bleed – a possible warning sign of gingivitis, the initial stage of gum disease.*

It's encouraging to see the World Health Organisation has published a global strategy on oral health, helping to flag the issues of the world's most common preventable diseases: tooth decay and gum disease and also the increase of erosive tooth wear. As dental professionals we all play a part in driving this strategy forward.

At every dental appointment and when promoting oral health in between visits there is an opportunity to work with patients on establishing better routines especially with the vast majority of our survey respondents indicating that they know the importance of looking after their teeth and gums to avoid the need for treatment in the future.

Louis MacKenzie,
Head Dental Officer, Denplan



Links between oral health and general health

Dental professionals know that the relationship between oral health and general health is important and has been the focus of research for decades but what exactly do the public know about this connection? Our research shows that almost a quarter don't know the medical conditions that can be linked to poor oral health.

Links have been established between gum disease and diabetes and share common risk factors with the most prevalent chronic conditions including heart disease and strokes. This supports the important role that good oral health plays in our overall wellbeing, as well as the importance of regular dental visits.

Do people recognise the links between oral health and general health?

75% of adults agree that poor oral health can have a significant impact on general health

In actual fact, with the exception of diabetes, the link to other medical conditions because of poor oral health is because of shared common risk factors such as smoking, obesity, poor diet rather than solely caused by a patient's oral health.

Louis MacKenzie,
Head Dental Officer, Denplan

Did you know?

24% of people don't know the medical conditions that can be linked to poor oral health

Which health conditions do people think can be linked to poor oral health?

- 53%** think it can be linked to mouth cancer
- 17%** think it can be linked to heart disease and heart attacks
- 12%** think it can be linked to diabetes
- 10%** think it can be linked to respiratory disease (e.g. bronchitis, pneumonia etc)
- 6%** think it can be linked to strokes
- 6%** think it can be linked to dementia
- 5%** think it can be linked to irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- 4%** think it can be linked to rheumatoid arthritis
- 3%** think it can be linked to low-birth weight babies

Importance of dentists

- 75%** agree that in general, GPs, school nurses and similar health professionals should include oral health as part of general health checks
- 52%** agree that if diagnosed with a serious health condition, they would speak to their dentist about managing oral health implications potentially linked

Experiencing good oral health, comfortably and confidently, enables an individual to achieve their full capacity and participation in society. Oral health is integral to overall health, wellbeing and quality of life, from birth to old age.

World Health Organisation¹

Mouth cancer

For more than two decades Denplan has played a part in raising awareness of mouth cancer.

Involved in both sponsoring the Oral Health Foundation's Mouth Cancer Action Month campaign held annually in November, but also through our work with member dentists. Denplan has also focused on bringing the campaign message to the heart of government with outreach to MPs and policy makers to improve understanding of the issue amongst those whose decisions impact patients' lives.

Dental practice teams are in a unique position to help detect early signs and potentially save lives. Sadly, we know that during the pandemic many cases of mouth cancer have gone undiagnosed due to people being unable to access regular dentistry.

Additional research shows the lack of awareness of the disease that continues to rise in the population with more than 8,700 mouth cancer cases in the UK every year².

Knowledge and fear of mouth cancer

- 12%** have never heard of mouth cancer³
- 16%** don't know the symptoms of mouth cancer³
- 14%** of adults are most concerned about mouth cancer when it comes to their oral health

In a recent survey³ **73%** identified that smoking cigarettes is a cause of mouth cancer but less than half cited drinking excessive alcohol as a risk. Awareness was also poor for other risk factors, including the human papillomavirus (**24%**).

Checking for mouth cancer

- 64%** of adults have never checked themselves for mouth cancer at home³
- 10%** of adults have check themselves every six months or less at home³

Did you know?

83% are not confident what they are looking for or don't know what the signs are when checking themselves for mouth cancer³

Awareness raising of mouth cancer

- 80%** of adults have not seen any public health messages on mouth cancer³
- 79%** of adults agree there should be more public health messaging about mouth cancer³

Of those that agree **76%** of adults say public health messages about mouth cancer should be displayed at dental practices.³

Importance of dentists

- 43%** of adults would seek advice from a dentist if they had a mouth ulcer that didn't heal³
- 37%** of the adults that have seen public health messages about mouth cancer saw them at their dental practice³
- 13%** of adults have been provided educational information about mouth cancer by a doctor, dentist or health professional³

As dental professionals, we have the opportunity to lead conversations on mouth cancer and make sure patients are aware of the risks, signs and symptoms. If we can help people to make positive lifestyle choices, remain vigilant to any changes in their mouth, and seek professional help at the earliest stage, we can help to save lives.

Dr Catherine Rutland,
Clinical Director, Denplan



¹ www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-discussion-paper-draft-global-strategy-on-oral-health

² Oral Health Foundation. The State of Mouth Cancer UK report 2020/21

³ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+) conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 6-8 October 2021.

Children's oral health

As a profession we strive to ensure children have the best start to their dental care as we know it can have a significant influence on their oral health for life. Poor brushing routines, high sugar diets and infrequent dental visits are having devastating effects on many children's oral health, and hospital admissions for tooth extractions in teenagers and children are still at unacceptably high levels.

We asked parents how often their child visits the dentist, their brushing habits (and parental supervision) to try and uncover where potential problems may lie.

When did your child last visit the dentist for a routine check up?

- 35%** said within the last 6 months
- 21%** said within the last 12 months
- 22%** said within the last 1-2 years
- 11%** said 3 years or longer

Brushing habits of children

- 66%** of parents say their children brush their teeth twice a day
- 15%** of parents say their children brush their teeth once a day
- 2%** of parents say their children never brush their teeth

Parental supervision of brushing

- 39%** of adults **don't** supervise their children's tooth brushing

Of those who do supervise the brushing of their children's teeth, respondents claim to have/will stop supervising tooth brushing when the children are:

- 5%** at 3 years old
- 12%** at 4-5 years old
- 27%** at 6-8 years old
- 20%** at 9-10 years old



Oral health impact on the everyday lives of children

- 16%** of children have missed school because of oral health problems
- 28%** of children have missed school because of oral health problems in London - highest in the UK

From those who needed emergency dental treatment in the last year:

- 14%** took time off work for their child/children to receive emergency treatment problems
- 25%** took between 5-8 hours off work because of emergency treatment for their child/children

Oral health impact on the everyday lives of children

- 26%** of parents asked stated their child/children has had tooth decay
- 47%** of those that had a child with tooth decay say that the tooth was extracted as a result

Of those who had a tooth extracted:

- 41%** were hospitalised for their tooth extraction with no general anaesthetic used
- 38%** were hospitalised for their tooth extraction with general anaesthetic used

Number of cavities in children

Of those adults that answered their child/children has had tooth decay (26%), here are the number of cavities they listed:

- 32%** 1 cavity
- 42%** 2 cavities
- 14%** 3 cavities
- 5%** 4 or more cavities

“Regular dental visits help children get into a good oral health routine, as well as ensuring that any problems or signs of tooth decay are detected at an early stage. Dental professionals are aware of the worrying state of the oral health of young people in the UK, and strongly reinforce the importance of good diet and oral hygiene habits. Almost a third of children have had between one and five fillings, and one in ten children have missed a full day of school due to tooth decay. Extractions remain high in children have had tooth decay. Approximately 50% of parents report that their children have had a tooth extracted because of cavities. The dental profession is seeing large geographical and socio-economic-linked oral variations. Almost one in four children in the North West of the UK have experienced tooth decay. A view that is also backed up through our conversations with our member dentists and the work that we do with parliamentarians and policy makers.”

Louis MacKenzie,
Head Dental Officer, Denplan

About Denplan, part of Simplyhealth

Denplan is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist with more than 6,600 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.3 million patients registered to Denplan products.

Denplan, also provides a wide range of professional services for its member dentists and their practice teams, including the Denplan Quality Programme and Denplan Excel Certification Programme. Plus, regulatory advice, business and marketing consultancy services and networking opportunities.

To find out more, visit www.denplan.co.uk

About Simplyhealth

Since 1872, we've been helping people make the most of life through better everyday health. Our plans make sure individuals, families and employees can easily access in-person and virtual wellbeing services, and afford to stay healthy by claiming costs back on dental treatments, visits to the optician, complementary therapies and much more.

Today we're a leading UK health solutions company, with almost 1000 colleagues serving 2.3 million customers. We don't have shareholders, so we're led by our Purpose of improving access to healthcare, for the many, for the long term. We're passionate about using our voice in public health affairs and partnering with charities to reduce health inequality – each year we commit to giving 10% of pre-tax profits to a range of community causes. And we ensure our business takes care of the planet too, achieving Carbon Neutral + status in 2021.

To find out more, visit www.simplyhealth.co.uk



About Dr Catherine Rutland

As Clinical Director for Denplan and Simplyhealth, Dr Catherine Rutland leads on clinical governance, which creates an environment of continuously improving standards. This is hugely important for all healthcare providers, but particularly for small independent dental practices.

Catherine Rutland represents both organisations at stakeholder events and in communications with healthcare regulatory, representative and academic bodies, as well as indemnity organisations. As part of her dental work, she represents the 'voice of private dentistry', bringing the view of Denplan's thousands of member dentists to policy makers.

After qualifying as a dentist from Leeds University in 1992 and securing a House Officer position, Catherine worked as a Senior House Officer in Newcastle before settling into general dental practice. Catherine joined Denplan part-time in 2010 and was promoted to her current position in 2019. She has 19 years' experience as a joint partner in a private dental practice in Berkshire, and completed a Masters in Medical Ethics and Law from King's College London in 2013. She is also a certified member of the Institute of Risk Management and completed a Level 7 Certificate in Leadership Mentoring and Coaching in 2016.



About Louis Mackenzie

As Head Dental Officer at Denplan, Louis Mackenzie works with thousands of Denplan dentists at Denplan conferences, seminars, hands-on courses and at our training, sporting, charity and social events. He is leading Denplan's work on training to ensure practice teams provide high quality patient-centred care and that clinical teams achieve their goals of preventing disease and maintaining optimal oral health.

He has been a General Dental Practitioner for 30 years and is a clinical lecturer at the University of Birmingham School of dentistry and King's College London.

Louis delivers postgraduate lectures nationally and internationally on direct and indirect restorative techniques, minimally invasive dentistry and clinical photography and runs a series of popular hands-on courses. He is also a member of Dental Update's editorial board.

