

# Wheelchair Accessible Dentistry

## RADAR position paper

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### RADAR

1. RADAR is the UK's leading pan-disability charity working to represent the needs and expectations of over 10.8 million disabled people in the UK.
2. RADAR is a national network of over 750 disability organisations and disabled people. We play a key role at the heart of the disability movement, acting with independence to clarify and channel the needs and expectations of disabled people and organisations to Westminster and Whitehall, and launching campaigns to promote equality for all disabled people.
3. Our vision is of a society where human difference is routinely anticipated, expertly accommodated and positively celebrated.

### What is the problem?

4. The scientific literature confirms that people with disabilities have similar oral diseases but poorer oral health and poorer health outcomes from care than the general population (British Dental Association (2003) *Oral Healthcare for Older People: 2020 Vision*. London: British Dental Association.) Furthermore, when dental decay is treated it is more likely to have resulted in extractions than fillings, crowns and bridges (Steele JG, et al (1998) *National Diet and Nutrition Survey; adults aged 65 and over*. London: HMSO)(Lawton L (2002) *Providing dental care for special patients – tips for the general dentist*. Journal of the American Dental Association; 133: 1666-1670).
5. Wheelchair users face the same mobility and dental provision challenges (*Guidelines for oral health care for people with a physical disability*. Policy document of the British society for Disability and Oral Health (2000) <http://www.bsodh.org.uk/guidelines/physical.pdf>) Put simply wheelchair-users are likely to have more missing teeth than non-wheelchair-users.
6. The reason for this is not that wheelchair-users have worse oral hygiene than non-wheelchair-users. The problem is that wheelchair-users who

cannot transfer, or find it difficult to transfer, to a standard dental chair have to be treated in their wheelchair. When a patient has to be treated in their wheelchair, the angle that the dentist has to work at is almost impossible to do any detailed work, and so the simplest solution, extraction, is used. In addition, a dentist who attempts to do detailed work whilst the patient remains in their wheelchair is risking back injury.

7. For those wheelchair-users who can transfer to a standard dental chair with assistance, manual lifting or hoisting can be very time consuming. It can often take over half an hour to get someone from their wheelchair to the dental chair, and another half an hour to get them back again, making it a very time-consuming appointment.
8. This situation means that wheelchair-users are not receiving the same treatment as non-wheelchair-users in dentistry. The Disability Equality Duty, and arising Disability Equality Schemes developed by Primary Care Trusts seek to address discrimination and inequality. All Primary Care Trusts should therefore be examining ways to rectify this obvious problem.

### **What is the solution?**

9. RADAR believes that this issue can be solved simply and quickly. Each Primary Care Trust across England and Wales should commit to purchasing one fully mobile dental platform designed specifically for wheelchair patients.
10. Diaco has developed a dental chair which enables a wheelchair-user to remain in their own wheelchair while enabling the optimal angle for dental care treatment for both the patient and the clinical team. It is the result of 24 months of development, involving a large advisory group of wheelchair-users and dentists.
11. The Diaco dental chair does not require any modification to the surgery or equipment. It can be wheeled in and out of storage and between surgeries or departments, using its built-in electric drive, and is ready for use within two minutes of being moved into position.
12. Using a Diaco dental chair ensures that all wheelchair-users are afforded dignity and equality when receiving dental treatment. In addition, it will ensure that Primary Care Trusts do not become liable for any injury that dentists may suffer whilst treating wheelchair-users without the appropriate equipment to do so.
13. The mobile chair is suitable for use with any standard or electric wheelchair. In addition to wheelchair-users (which number over 900,000 in England and Wales) the chair can be used for any person who may



14. have difficulty either getting into a standard dental chair or sitting in one for any length of time.
15. 15% of Primary Care Trusts in England and 20% in Wales have already purchased the Diaco dental chair and RADAR believes it is essential that the rest follow.