

## Could do better

Most patients are satisfied with their NHS dental care but there are some areas where services could be improved, finds a survey by the Healthcare Commission.

More than one in five patients (23 per cent) felt their dentist could do more to help control their pain and the same number said they did not feel their dentist had explained the reasons for any treatment clearly enough.

Nearly a third (31 per cent) of patients would like to be more involved in decisions about their dental care and treatment.

While three quarters of

patients (75 per cent) said they had complete confidence and trust in their dentist, this figure was two per cent lower than the previous year.

Access to dentistry remains a concern. The survey of 120,000 patients found that only 58 per cent of patients were registered with their dentist as an NHS patient. Two thirds of patients (67 per cent) who were not registered as an NHS patient said they would like to be.

'There is a terrible lack of NHS dentists, I was forced to go private by my then NHS dentist,' said one respondent.

The Healthcare Commission's chairman, Prof Sir Ian Kennedy, said: 'In general, patients have given a 'thumbs up' to the care they receive from the NHS. However, those patients who do not feel completely involved in decisions about their care and treatment are not able to consent to treatment in any meaningful sense.'

'While there has been a great improvement in communication between NHS staff and their patients there is still much to be done to ensure that patients understand the information they are given and can influence decisions.'■