toothfairy

OPEROSE HEALTH | CASE STUDY

Hidden in *plain sight...*

Operose Health

How Operose Health Uncovered Huge Costs Caused by Chronic Dental Access Issues

A Toothfairy case study with Operose Health

1,800 colleagues | £400,000+ annual absence cost | Signed off in one week



About Operose Health

Operose Health is the UK's largest provider of NHS primary care, looking after around 700,000 patients across roughly 80 GP practices, urgent care centres and specialist services. Its workforce of approximately 1,800 people is overwhelmingly frontline: GPs, nurses, pharmacists and practice teams, with fewer than 10% in corporate or remote roles.

1,800

Colleagues, fewer than 10% in corporate or remote roles

700,000

NHS primary care patients

80

GP practices, urgent care centres and specialist services

It started with an open text box

The business had grown quickly through acquisition and benefits had to keep up. When Paul Rushton joined as Director of People and Culture, he inherited what he describes as "hygienic, statutory benefits. Nothing that you'd say was really branching out of the norm."

His starting point was the engagement survey already on his desk. Its benefits section asked what was landing well, what colleagues were using, and where there was a gap the organisation should be filling. Critically, it left space for free text.

Dental was not on anyone's list of expected answers. Despite existing EAPs, pathways and cash plans, one issue surfaced repeatedly and entirely unprompted.

"It was quite clear and quite obvious that one of the things the team wanted was a dental solution. It's a theme that was coming up in a lot of text comments quite regularly. I think one in every six or seven that we pulled out from the benefits section were mentioning dental."

Paul Rushton, Director of People and Culture, Operose Health



The comments came from every kind of role and every part of the country, describing cancelled appointments, months-long waiting lists and pain colleagues were simply living with:

What Toothfairy's dental risk report found inside Operose Health:



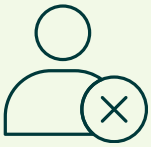
86%

of colleagues likely to have some kind of dental concern



7,879

individual dental concerns estimated across the workforce at any given time, with four to six oral health issues typically present in any one mouth



£400,000+

of estimated absence cost per year caused by dental issues

£284,000

net ROI on a prevention-first intervention



1 week

the executive team signed off inside a week, in February, and Operose Health were live in April

When Operose Health asked its 1,800 colleagues what was missing from their benefits, one answer came back again and again, unprompted: getting to a dentist had become nearly impossible. Putting a number on that demand exposed more than £400,000 of annual absence cost hiding in plain sight, and built a business case the executive team signed off inside a week.

“I've had a dental issue this year and there's no cover in the business.”

“Can you look at something for all colleagues?”

Verbatim, Operose Health colleague survey responses

For an organisation delivering NHS primary care to 700,000 patients, hearing that its own workforce could not get basic dental treatment was too consistent a signal to overlook.

The blind spot: silence mistaken for satisfaction

Operose Health's result is not an outlier, but most employers never see it.

Toothfairy's employee dental benefits research found that 49% of employers say dental access concerns have not been raised by staff in the past year.

Feedback only surfaces where there is a channel to capture it. Larger organisations, which listen more actively, hear the concern far more often: 27% through line managers, 23.4% through anonymous channels, 22% through pulse checks.

Across every employer size, “no concern raised” remains the most numerous outcome. Silence is being mistaken for satisfaction. And the absence it causes is just as invisible.

“The reality is, the vast majority of companies we speak to don't formally track oral absence. There probably isn't even an option for it in the HR system in most cases. It's one of those risks that tends to fly under the radar until we start to lift the hood and poke around a little bit.”

Matt Johnson, Chief Revenue Officer, Toothfairy

Under the hood, the numbers are substantial

The UK has fewer dentists per capita than any comparable nation, and around 80% of working-age adults rely on NHS practices. British Dental Association data shows:

1 in 10 success rate for registering as a new NHS patient

97% failure rate at accessing any care at all for those unregistered and unable to absorb private costs

14 million unmet dental needs in the working population

23 million working days lost a year



Queues outside an NHS clinic in Warrington full of prospective patients attempting to register with a dentist.

Two factors multiply that risk: a physically present, site-based workforce, and a significant proportion of employees on or near the national living wage. Operose Health has both. For a provider contracted to keep clinical chairs filled, an untracked sick day is not a line on a spreadsheet.

> “It doesn't just become a ‘someone's absent' conversation. We have to backfill if someone is not there to fulfil our contract requirements and ensure that access is still there for the continuity of care for our patients. If a GP goes off with a dental issue, that's an immediate increased spend. Even a small piece of movement in our absence percentage, you're talking thousands of pounds in terms of our overall agency spend.” - Paul Rushton

Affordability compounds it. Of colleagues close to the national living wage, Rushton notes: “The reliance on NHS dentistry in that portion of our workforce will be high, and there wouldn't be the affordability to go private consistently.”

Making the invisible visible

To move from anecdote to business case, Operose Health commissioned a Toothfairy dental risk report.

The model

The model runs an organisation's own demographic and firmographic data against more than 200 external data sets, splits the workforce between those who rely on private dentistry and those who rely on the NHS, and separates reducible planned appointments from unscheduled dental care, the short-notice absence that drives most agency backfill.

Many of those concerns are asymptomatic; others are advanced bruxism, PUFA infections, pocketing and cavities. All sit in the bucket of prevention, and all eventually convert into a planned appointment or an unplanned absence.

The CFO question

The report went to the finance team, and the challenge was the obvious one.

“I think it was the sensible question of: ‘well, is this really going on, guys, across the business?' And we were confident to be able to say yes. We all know someone in our teams or in practice who started a little bit later because they had an appointment, or nipped out for half an hour to an appointment, but we weren't necessarily tracking that.”

Paul Rushton

It's an obvious point which is rarely given the gravitas it deserves; every single routine checkup, every dental issue that requires intervention, every niggling dental pain or challenge means an absence the business is paying for. It just had no code against it.

Choosing a solution

The requirements were straightforward.

Fast, giving colleagues advice or a booking without waiting weeks in discomfort.

Universal, reaching practice teams from Devon to Leeds alongside remote colleagues, on a lunch break or from the sofa.

Affordable and **scalable**.

Simple internally, with no P11D complexity or tax thresholds for colleagues to worry about.

That last requirement ruled out the conventional route. Voluntary, cash-back style plans attract “the top 10 to 20% at best of people that actively invest in their oral health,” Johnson says. “They already had healthy teeth, but now they're getting money back. The people causing that operational disruption, the agency spend, the short-term unplanned absences, they are the group that won't enrol.”

Employer-funded universal coverage was the only model that reached the population driving the cost.

Toothfairy delivers on-demand dentist chat and video consultations, usually inside 30 minutes, clinical image review, oral risk assessments scored on a 20 to 30 point red, amber, green baseline, same-day prescriptions and prevention toolkits. Around 70% of cases are resolved digitally with no appointment needed; for the rest, real-time availability across roughly 1,400 clinics gets colleagues seen within 72 hours.



Signed off in a week, live in two months

“The Exec Team were very receptive. Very positive, because we'd done a really good job of creating that narrative of employee demand alongside the business case information. It was quite a straightforward conversation to be able to say, well actually, we've got the demand, the costs are here, this is the benefit we want to see. I made the pitch and it was signed off relatively quickly. Signed off within a week, in February, and we were live in April, in the new financial year.” - Paul Rushton

Dental now sits inside Operose Health's Our Care Benefits package. Paul continues:

“We wanted to respond [to colleague surveys] by providing practical support that helps remove one of the barriers many people now face when looking after their oral health. Partnering with Toothfairy gives our colleagues quick and convenient access to dental care, helping them get advice and support when they need it most.”

See it for yourself

If this reflects your own organisation, the next step is a dental risk report on your own workforce. It costs nothing, it runs on your demographic data, and it produces the number your CFO will ask for. Visit toothfairyapp.co.uk/for-business or speak to the Toothfairy team.

Book a demo

toothfairyapp.co.uk/for-business#quote

Get your bespoke risk report

toothfairyapp.co.uk/b2b-calculator



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Book an intro meeting with Toothfairy to see how we can help your organisation improve dental access and build benefits for a modern workforce:

Scan here:

If you have any questions about Toothfairy, please contact us.

https://toothfairyapp.co.uk/for-business

benefits@toothfairyapp.co.uk

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