CHOOSING YOUR DENTIST

Ideally, choosing a dentist who has successfully treated a child with a similar condition to that of your child may often be the wisest choice. Another family in your area who has developed a relationship with a local dentist and has had successful treatment is often your best resource.

Care in the primary sector may be provided by a dental practitioner under either the NHS scheme or privately, as well as by the Community Dental Service. NHS direct (http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk), is a useful source of information. Primary care dentists often treat patients with Hypodontia in conjunction with specialised multidisciplinary teams, which are usually based in dental hospitals.

An alternative source of professional support is via a specialist in Paediatric Dentistry, that is a specialist in the dental care of children, who may well have treated children with ED either as part of specialty training or in practice. Another specialist who may help is the Prosthodontist, or Restorative Dentist, who has expertise in the replacement of teeth, but probably has little experience in treating children. You can search for local specialists on the General Dental Council's web site (http://www.gdc-uk.org). Since ED is relatively rare and the dental findings so varied, few dentists can count themselves as wise and experienced in ED treatment.

Even if you live in a large metropolitan area you may be unable to find the experienced dentists you prefer. That being the case there are some basic characteristics you should look for in choosing a local dentist. The most important characteristic for the ideal dentist for your child is a warm, friendly, reassuring personality. Skill in the making of the required dental appliances (dentures or bridges) is important, but success in treating children is often the most important factor and the result of the confidence in which the child holds in the dentist can be the key to success. A small number of patients with an ED require treatment with dentures. Successfully using these at an early age is more often the result of a good relationship between the child and dentist, and the determination and persistence of the parents than the actual making of the appliance. Since this sensitive relationship is so important, choosing a dentist your child will like is extremely important.

Another key factor to success, if not as crucial, is the involvement and participation of the family. Treatment may be a complete success, but if the family is not supportive then there is nothing the dentist can do to encourage or make the child adapt to and use the dentures once he leaves the surgery. A positive attitude and encouragement by everyone involved in treatment is the key to success.

In summary, first look for a dentist who has successfully treated other patients with an Ectodermal Dysplasia, then see whether your local community dental service can help, or seek a specialist in Paediatric dentistry or possibly Prosthodontics or Restorative Dentistry. Bear in mind the possibility of a referral to a specialist Hypodontia Clinic. A dentist with a good reputation for treating children, together with a positive approach by everyone involved in the treatment, including the child, are often significant keys to success.