

We are very honoured

S Hancocks, OBE*

Jim, Chairman of your BDA Branch and currently dentist to the local MP, has managed to persuade him to address an evening meeting. You are indeed honoured.

‘...and so, without further ado, it gives me great pleasure to introduce him as our guest speaker this evening.... (polite applause).

‘Thank you very much indeed Mr Chairman for that very kind preamble. As a matter of fact I hardly recognised myself from such a flattering introduction. I had to look around to see who else had come into the room.’ (Slightly muffled, polite laughter).

‘I have to say that although it is a great pleasure to be here this evening, it is also something of a first for me to be able to talk to not just one dentist but a whole group, without even having to put any cotton wool in my mouth or one of those funny little plastic things that makes everything so dry.’ (Gruntly sort of slightly reluctant laughter).

‘However, to be serious, I was delighted to accept Jim’s kind invitation to come and talk to you in order to be able to tell you a little about how we envision the future of dental provision here and throughout this great land of ours.

‘I would like to say at the outset, to reassure you, that we are, of course, totally committed to the very highest standards in the care that we want to provide in partnership with yourselves, from first to last. The challenge that we now face provides us, surely, with the opportunity to create the vehicle by which we can deliver an otherwise unrivalled programme of action. Indeed to formulate, with your cooperation and experience, a unique skill mix by creating a valued up-front team. A team whose dynamic integration into the societal partnership of healthcare providers and needs-based customers can be both insightful and innovative in the balanced approach to the cross-boundary flow of matrix determinants that is the late 1990s. In order to rise to such a challenge and to hit the ground running on a level playing field, we will, of course, need to look closely at both costs and benefits.’ (Murmurs).

‘This will mean, in turn, a no-holds barred analysis of the macro and micro scale outcomes within the social and economic environment overlaid, as it inevitably is, with an ever-moving tapestry of both inequality and affluence.’ (Slightly confused, obligatory applause). (Speaker sips from glass of water and smiles).

‘But I know that you are very practical men and women for whom fine words butter no parsnips. And I can hear you asking yourselves, ‘what does all this mean for me?’ Well, I would like to spend a few minutes trying to answer that ques-

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tion for you.’ (Audible mutters and scraping of chairs on floor).

‘Indeed, I insist on putting our policy into plain language, straightforward words, terms that pragmatic people like yourselves can readily assimilate and comprehend as we move forward together in what we all hope and trust will be an ongoing commitment to quality endeavour and progression.

‘Many of you, I am aware, are small businessmen and women and we are cognisant of this in our attempts to inform the shape of future services in the important consultation pilot phase upon which we have every intention of embarking. We wish to learn from the lessons that the past has to teach us and not be, as has happened, undeniably in history in the past, overtly prescriptive. However, simultaneously, we must also be seen to

be catering for the essential ingredient in the equation, value for money, your money too, as tax-payers.’ (Detectably more enthusiastic clapping from one section of the room).

‘But I would like to stress, and to stress to you most sincerely, that we have an empathy with all involved, and who will inevitably be involved in the future in what is, in anybody’s book, a sea-change in the delivery of integrated dental services with linkage, co-terminosity and best practice. Performance measured and accounted for using the evidence-based approach that we can now grasp within the context of a community wide minimum data set.’ (Silence). (A confident further sip of water).

‘I am sure that many of you will want to question the detail of the overall context in which I have been setting out these plans tonight. I will, of course, be pleased to clarify these as well as I am able. But I would say this to you; that inevitably there are pieces of the jigsaw that are not yet in place. Indeed I know, as I say once again, that as practical people you will appreciate that it is not possible at this stage in the derivation of this exciting multi-agency initiative, to be as precise as both you and I would like. But please be reassured that we are committed to move forward with you, together, in partnership, in unison, in order to complete this vision and lay the foundations of a bigger and better picture still.’ (Big swig of water at crescendo). (A minor-ovation of uncertain enthusiasm and dulled confusion).

(Chairman rises). ‘Thank you very much indeed for that insight into current thinking on oral healthcare policy. I know that you have to dash back to London now for tomorrow’s important vote and that unfortunately there is no time for questions but I would like to say what an honour.....’

* The author is commissioning editor for the BDJ.