

# Focus Awards 2001



**The teams from five dental centres were recently invited to an Awards Ceremony at the Royal College of Surgeons in London in recognition of their work in improving patients' experience of obtaining dental care. Liane Voisey finds out more.**

Dental practice teams came from far and wide to attend the recent Focus Awards ceremony at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. Teams from the Wirral, Nottingham, London, Derbyshire and Leeds donned their glad rags to attend the award ceremony, where the top prize was £2,000 for the winning practice. For many it was a surprise that the nomination form they had filled in during their lunch break and posted off without a second thought could have led to this one moment.

When selecting the finalists, judges were looking for original patient-focused innovations. The winning practice, would be the one, to quote John Renshaw, chairman of the BDA Executive Board who spoke at the Awards ceremony, to have stood out as having 'gone the extra mile'. Woodlands Dental Practice in the Wirral appeared to fit that criteria. So what made this practice so special? Maybe it was a mixture of exciting initiatives that looked after both the staff as well as the patients.

### The winning formula

A PDS practice, Woodlands Dental Practice made it that little bit easier for patients to visit its practice, particularly if they wanted to make an emergency appointment.

The reception was well-staffed with three extra phones lines installed to avoid an engaged tone when patients phone. Two hours had been set aside every morning for emergency appointments, which could only be booked by patients before or on the same day and there was also a 24 hour bleep number for patients in trouble.

The Woodlands Dental Practice was also equipped to deal with patients with special needs. A CDS dentist and dental therapist would visit the practice on a part-time basis to offer sedation for special needs or phobic

children. A special preventative dental unit was also set up on site for children, where they could be shown how to clean their teeth. There was disabled access and toilets, a confidential area for patients to discuss problems in private and a childrens' play area. A great emphasis had also been placed on staff training, again to the advantage of their patients. Staff had attended customer care courses, for instance, and were also trained to recognize signs of child abuse.

The four finalists also displayed original patient-focused innovations. Strelley Health Centre in Nottingham has a high intake of special care and phobic children, so a dental nurse employs a series of techniques to relax them, using puppets, blowing bubbles and even playing musical instruments to put them at their ease. The

Melbourne Dental Practice in Derbyshire is also child-friendly and has practice staff looking after children while their parents are being treated (opposite page, bottom left). The practice also installed its own oral health promotion projects to help educate patients. It advertised its own annual mouth cancer screening week in the local press inviting both patients and non-patients alike. It also provides 'welcome' booklets which explain how the practice works and practice philosophy. The practice designs its own information leaflets and holds regular competitions and exhibitions.

Many dental practices had also shown an interest in connecting to the world wide web. Leeds-based '68 The Dental Practice' sent out a patient survey so it could gain useful feedback about setting up a practice



**The team from Woodlands Dental Practice — practice owner Philip Ratcliffe holding the Focus Awards poster with Chief Dental Officer Margaret Seward and BDA President Peter Swiss.**

**About the Focus Awards**

The Focus Awards are a joint initiative between the Department of Health and the British Dental Association, set up to recognise and reward patient-focused innovations within dental practices that have taken place in the last two years.

In order to participate, each entrant had to submit a form nominating a practice or clinic. The categories specified on the form included patients' experience in contacting the practice/clinic before, during and after treatment, patients' experience in the reception or waiting area, patients' experiences during clinical treatment and general communication with patients. The final category was for any other patient-focused innovation.



**MP Dental Practice in London had their very own Juice Bar which they shared with patients from Age Concern Southwark.**

website. Once installed, the website meant patients could e-mail questions or appointment requests; they could also download useful information.

MP Dental Practice in London was also very computer aware. This practice provides animated patient education software to show patients at their chairside. Sharing premises with Age Concern Southwark also means that the two can cross refer patients to each other. Patients can wander across to the joint healthy living Juice Bar and use the internet cafe (above right).

**Assisting special needs patients**

Among the non-finalist entries some of the innovations created by dental practices really stood out, particularly for their work in creating disabled and child friendly environments. Take The Smile Centre in Nottingham; its principal dentist trained in

NLP who helped design how staff in the centre use language to approach and communicate with their patients. The practice also produced a bi-annual newsletter that was printed on the reverse of reminder letters. Hest Bank Dental Centre in Lancaster provided disabled-only parking, a ramp with a handrail leading directly to reception and special toilet facilities and seating. The Peace Community Dental Clinic had a ceiling mounted hoist in the main surgery and toilet to allow access for wheelchair-bound adults and children — this initiative has given access to clients who may previously have only been able to receive treatment at home. Choices Dental Care Centre in Nottingham made its practice more accessible to the visually impaired; producing brochures and information leaflets in braille, large print and audiotape formats, and taking them on an orientation tour on

their first visit. Mr Williams Dental Practice in Suffolk gave patients the opportunity to write their suggestions for the practice in a questionnaire, with an award for the best one. As a direct result of this, the practice provided two additional high chairs for elderly people who find it difficult to get out of sofas.

Some practices had interpreters for non-English patients. In Hyde, Stockport, there is a large Bengali community, but few speak English. Hyde Dental Practice decided to employ a worker to visit families at home to discuss their anxieties, assist them in making appointments and accompany them if necessary. Appreciating that an educated patient is a motivated patient, The Dental Surgery in Weston-super-Mare play three different channels of DVD educational material in their waiting rooms. The screens are at various heights to complement their policy of creating a child and disabled-friendly environment, which is further supplemented by variable height seating and a split level reception desk. Many practices had websites and allowed patients to interact with them via e-mail. Waiting room comfort was also on the minds of The Cassiobury Dental Practice in Watford. The reception and waiting area of this practice used a combination of aromatherapy oils and non-clinical décor to provide a calm, relaxing atmosphere.

The Focus Awards provided the opportunity to reward just some of these patient-focused initiatives installed in practices all over the UK and perhaps gave inspiration to other practices who wish to submit an entry next year.

The BDJ will run a series of articles focusing on each of the five practice finalists starting in 2002.



**Childcare facilities at The Melbourne Dental Practice in Derbyshire.**