

'Women dentists qualifying today do not perceive any discrimination in their profession and see no need for an organisation to support women dentists.'

Job done

In the overall scheme of things, 1985 is not very long ago. That was the year in which Women in Dentistry UK (WiD) was formed. The two catalysts which led to the formation of WiD were the court case in which an individual dentist (Jenny Pinder, subsequently first Chair of WiD) successfully challenged the discrimination against women in rates of permanent health insurance, and the overwhelming rejection by the BDA's Representative Board of a motion to form a Women's Section in the BDA. In the period from 1977 to 1985, the BDA had been asked to address the inequalities experienced by women dentists, but had perceived no reason to do so.

Women in Dentistry UK (WiD) celebrates its 21st anniversary in 2006 having spent these years working to counter the inequalities experienced by women dentists and to provide a network of support, education and information for its members.¹

Over the years WiD has lobbied on, and been involved in, many issues of importance for women dentists. Resultant changes include:

- Equality for women dentists in the NHS pension scheme
- Alteration of wording in the General Dental Council (GDC) Guidance Notes for Dentists from 'professional man' to 'professional person'
- Provision of Maternity Pay for dentists in the General Dental Service
- Provision of entitlement under the NHS pension scheme for widowers of dentists
- The Keeping in Touch and Getting Back to Practice schemes
- The Department of Health initiative to increase women's NHS practice commitments.

WiD also raised awareness of the disproportionately low number of female principals in general dental practice and the low representation of women dentists in the influential echelons of the dental and national establishment. We have subsequently seen the first woman President of the GDC, first woman Chief Dental Officer, and recently

first elected woman Chair of the BDA's Executive Board, among other notable appointments. We have seen the percentage of women rise to more than 50 per cent of dentists qualifying.

There are so many improvements in women dentists' expectations and experiences in their professional life today as compared with two decades ago. Every female dentist in the UK has benefited from the work of WiD. However, women dentists qualifying today do not perceive any discrimination in their profession and see no need for an organisation to support women dentists. They have their own peers for support and more specialist societies and organisations for information. None of this existed 21 years ago.

We are celebrating success and are confident that WiD has fulfilled its remit. Because of this, it is time to make decisions about the society's future. At an Extraordinary General Meeting held in London on 11 March 2006, members voted by a large majority that, having achieved its aims and objectives, the society should be wound up on 31 March 2007. It was also agreed at the EGM that any residual funds will be donated to charity. We intend to go out in style. Our annual dinner in November will be held at the House of Lords and we have planned WiD's calendar of events to provide opportunities for members and friends to join in our celebratory final year.

Women dentists are now far from being a minority group in the profession and we see that male and female dentists are affected in similar ways by the challenges facing the profession at the present time. We applaud the BDA for recognising the need to monitor and address the full spectrum of equality issues, and give our full support to the development of its Equality and Diversity Committee.

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1. www.widuk.org.

doi: 10.1038/sj.bdj.4813449