

letters

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: Evidence-based Dentistry, Nature Publishing Group, 4 Crinan St, London N1 9XW, UK

From Kimmo Mattila

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Dr Niederman was the author of an Editorial and a Commentary^{1,2} that were published recently in *Evidence-based Dentistry*. As he repeatedly referred to publications to which I contributed, I would like to reply.

Dr Niederman notes that, unlike earlier work, some recent studies—including one published by our group³—failed to find an association between dental infections and cardiovascular disease (CVD). He gives quite a negative impression of research that aims to investigate the link between dental infections and the pathogenesis of CVD. I do not agree with Dr Niederman. My understanding of an objective and balanced assessment of study results is very different from his. For me, it is self-evident that both positive and negative findings are published: there are probably some contrasting findings in all research areas. In our article³ we never wanted to suggest that there is no longer a reason to study the topic. On the contrary, it is now generally agreed that atherosclerosis is an inflammatory process. What the causes are of this inflammation is less well known. There is a good theoretical background and quite a number of clinical studies suggesting that chronic infection may be among the causes. The infections in question include not only dental infections but also infections caused by, for example, *Chlamydia pneumoniae* and herpesviruses. It is even possible that all chronic infections intense enough to cause a systemic inflammatory reaction are involved in the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis and its complications. All these observations warrant further studies in the field.

I can only hope that, despite Dr Niederman's efforts, open-minded researchers are not discouraged from continuing on their work in this exciting field.

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1. Niederman R, Joshipura K. Cause célèbre: oral health and heart disease. *Evidence-based Dentistry* 2000; 2:59–60.

2. Niederman R. Commentary. *Evidence-based Dentistry* 2000; 2:63.

3. Mattila KJ, Asikainen S, Wolf J, Jousimies-Somer H, Valtonen V, Nieminen MS. Age, dental infections and coronary heart disease. *J Dent Res* 2000; 79:756–760.

Rick Neiderman replies:

The points raised by Dr Mattila are spot on. More research is indeed needed. In particular, for improved patient care, we must conduct research that challenges, supports or refutes a role for dental infection in the causality of CVD. This is most efficaciously, although also most expensively, done with intervention trials (randomised controlled trials). The article on page 17 of this issue “Periodontal-systemic connection: a State of the Science symposium” speaks emphatically with regard to this point.