

From caring to crackers



Dental hygienist **Joss Harding** RDH CEB DipDH RADC 1992 from the Confident Dental and Implant Clinic in Stroud explains how her interest in supporting cancer patients began.

When you can't give patients any answers, you go in search yourself. That's the direction I headed in a few years ago after I went looking for information for patients undergoing cancer treatment. I found there really wasn't much available. After asking around, I was encouraged to write a definitive article which described the side effects of cancer drugs. This in turn led to an invitation from a local charity, BrushUpUk <http://www.brushupuk.com/> to compile some leaflets for them.

Another big turning point was learning about The Swallows Head and Neck Cancer Charity at the BDA annual Conference in Manchester in May 2017 where I was a speaker. I went to hear a presentation by Andrew Baldwin, Consultant Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Manchester who mentioned the charity. I was inspired to

look into the support it gives to head and neck cancer patients and carers. I contacted the Chairman – and recovering cancer sufferer - Chris Curtis and we emailed. We finally managed to meet face to face at this year's BDA dental conference and dental show.

their mouths are very healthy before starting treatment.

I am very lucky as I have a very supportive team. All my colleagues are aware that I have a big drawer of product samples available. We give xerostomia patients a bag of products to

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AND CARRIES WITH IT A RISK OF DENTAL DECAY.'

Chris loved my BrushUpUk leaflets which were produced from my original article. In turn, I was inspired by his cracker challenge! You have to see how many dry biscuits you can eat in a minute – which is very difficult when you are short on saliva. It's a good way of conjuring empathy from people who have never experienced xerostomia. The world record, I am told, is 4!

Xerostomia is a big issue for cancer sufferers and carries with it a risk of dental decay. Sometimes I find it falls to me to diagnose xerostomia. I always let patients know that I check their teeth, gums and saliva flow. PHE's Delivering Better Oral Health (DBOH)2017 toolkit¹ guides us with treatment options for these patients and prevention is always key.

I have referred a few patients over the years to their GPs for diabetes and Sjogrens Syndrome tests as we must take a holistic approach. They love the fact that we care. I let them know at each visit what has been going on. Many patients now book a

session with me when they have been given a diagnosis of cancer. They know to make sure

go away with so they can find which works best for them. I think it's fair to say that as a result of the research I have undertaken, my article, my leaflets and my presentations, our practice is now able to give all patients undergoing cancer treatment effective support, recommendations and treatment. It's been a gratifying journey.

1. Delivering Better Oral Health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention third edition. March 2017. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605266/Delivering_better_oral_health.pdf (Accessed August 21st 2018).

- Turn to page 13 for an article by Joss on xerostomia and how to manage patients.
- Turn to page 11 for more information about the BADN national conference at which Chris Curtis is a speaker.

