

LETTER

ESSENTIAL SAFEGUARDING TACTIC

Sir, I read, with interest, Mr Foster's article on Safeguarding in *BDJ Team*.¹ I was delighted to see safeguarding taking a prominent role in your publication and would like to take this opportunity to offer further support to this article. I would also like to highlight an often underutilised but nevertheless essential tactic with regards to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

Through training, dental professionals are taught to closely analyse behaviour of those we encounter when engaging, or frequently not engaging, with our services. We are told of indicators of neglect and abuse and are well-versed in identifying these, if not entirely in the subsequent pathway we are required to follow. A recent case within our hospital service has highlighted our responsibilities as dentists and dental care professionals even to those we do not encounter on our clinics.

During a routine outpatient assessment appointment, an adult patient, who attended alone, disclosed that she was dependent upon the use of heroin. Customarily, this would impact only upon this particular patient's ongoing care. There were, however, further implications that were realised by asking the simple question: 'who lives at home with you?'

Following this question, the aforementioned patient disclosed that she lived with her partner – a previous heroin dependent, now using methadone. Also within the household were three children

aged seventeen, fifteen and three. By way of this simple enquiry, it was revealed that there may be minors that were potentially at risk. Subsequently, the team were able to assemble the appropriate information and action accordingly.

I would urge both dental and medical colleagues to utilise this approach for all of our patients – adult and child, vulnerable and not. It is a simple addition to our clinical history-taking but may uncover crucial information. At worst, this could be absolutely key in the protection of children and vulnerable adults and, at best, will inform us more about the lives of our patients.

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References

1. Foster M. Safeguarding training is an absolute requirement to work in a dental practice. *BDJ Team* 2019; **6**: DOI: 10.1038/bdjteam.2019.43.

Write to us

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10.1038/s41407-019-0062-1

E-learning resource to inform societal support for children's oral health

A free online healthcare learning programme designed to support good oral health in children is now available.

The Children's Oral Health e-learning programme covers the main causes of tooth decay and the simple actions that can be taken to prevent the problem. It also explains when a child's primary and adult teeth start to appear, and what to do if a tooth is knocked out.

Aimed at parents, expectant mothers, early years healthcare workers, teachers, nurses, GPs and the public, the programme consists of one e-learning session that will take about 20 minutes to complete with a number of self-assessment questions to reinforce key issues.

The resource has been welcomed by the British Association of Dental Nurses. President Hazel Coey said: 'The messages are clear, and self-assessment learning an excellent idea. It should prove beneficial for dental teams to point parents and pre school/ nursery staff and others to the e-learning tool.'

'It is clear from research that children's oral health in the UK needs as much support as we can develop. The information on tackling an avulsed tooth is especially welcome. Oral health promotion is key to preventing tooth decay, especially in children, and I would like to see more dental nurses supporting dental practices in this important work.'

The programme was developed collaboratively by UCL with Health Education England's e-learning for Healthcare (HEE e-LfH), the Faculty of Dental Surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons and UCLH Eastman Dental Hospital. Further e-Learning for healthcare sessions are planned for 2019 to support the understanding of children's oral health advice for the health and social care workforce. The resource can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/eastman/news/2019/feb/free-online-learning-childrens-oral-health-advice-all>.



DENTAL LESSONS FROM SHARKS

An episode last month of the BBC Radio 4 programme *In Our Time* presented by Melvyn Bragg discussed ideas about the origins of teeth. **The Evolution of Teeth** looked at the link between teeth and hard scales on fish such as sharks and why some species regenerate theirs but humans do not. Great white sharks can produce up to 100,000 teeth in their lifetime but billions of years earlier, the ancestors of sharks and humans had no teeth at all, nor jaws. They were armoured fish, sucking in their food. The theory is that either their tooth-like scales began to appear in mouths as teeth,



or some of their taste buds became harder. If more was known about how sharks can regenerate their teeth, then we might learn how humans could grow new teeth in later lives. Listen to the programme here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0003zbg>.