

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Email bdj@bda.org. Priority will be given to letters less than 500 words long. Authors must sign the letter, which may be edited for reasons of space. Readers may now comment on letters via the *BDJ* website (www.bdj.co.uk). A 'Readers' Comments' section appears at the end of the full text of each letter online.

ORAL HEALTH

Salvadora persica

Sir, *Salvadora persica* is widely used amongst certain communities as a chewing stick.¹ It has been reported previously in the *BDJ* that it is used by the Somali people to clean their teeth.¹

S. persica, and its extracts, inhibit the growth of putative periodontal pathogens such as *Porphyromonas gingivalis* and *Actinomyces actinomycetemcomitans* as well as caries-associated pathogens including *Streptococcus mutans*. Commercially available *S. persica* is known to be treated with 'food grade chemicals' including 'softeners' (proprietary information held by the manufacturers), which may either positively or negatively affect the antimicrobial effects observed in this study.

We recently investigated the antimicrobial effects of commercially available *S. persica* samples against cultures of *S. mutans* (Fig. 1), *S. gordonii* and *P. gingivalis*. Our results indicate that the commercial *S. persica* sticks display antimicrobial action against both Gram positive (*S. mutans* and *S. gordonii*) and Gram negative (*P. gingivalis*) oral bacteria.

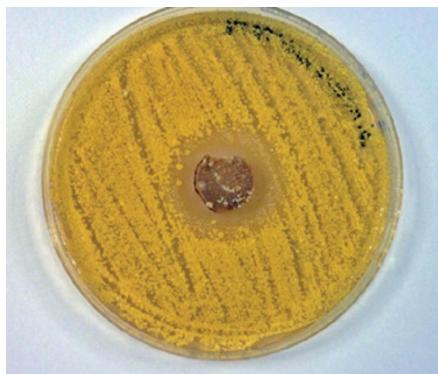


Fig. 1 *S. persica* disk (at the centre of the agar) diffusion assay showing growth inhibition of *S. mutans*

Taking into account current worldwide financial constraints, *S. persica* sticks may be a viable alternative to the established methods involving a toothbrush, toothpaste and/or a mouthwash. This may be of particular relevance to developing countries.

Thanks to Christopher K. Hope and Sabeel P. Valappil (University of Liverpool) for their guidance in this work.

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1. Coleman R O. Antibacterial twig. *Br Dent J* 2011; 211: 4.

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BDA MUSEUM

An irreplaceable loss

Sir, as the Honorary Secretary of the Lindsay Society the History of Dentistry, I feel it is my duty to write expressing my concern and that of the Society members, at the proposal of the Principal Executive Committee (PEC) of the BDA to make redundant two members of the BDA Museum staff, leaving just the Head of Museum Services in post.

The Museum is not just a world renowned collection of over 24,000 dental related items, many unique and valuable, but a living, breathing, high profile jewel within the BDA organisation. It should be valued and developed further, not cut off at its roots.

The Museum has been very fortunate to have had, for nearly eight years, a full time education officer who not only hosts school visits to the Museum but with her outreach programme has visited many schools, teaching and inspiring pupils about dentistry and related subjects. Over 10,000 youngsters have been involved in this educational programme – a phenomenal record of success. With the termination of her contract this beacon of excellence and pride in our profession will stop.

Over the years the Museum has received various bequests, not least of which was from John McLean for the Oral History Project. This is now up and running with equipment purchased, interviewers trained and seminars organised. This very important project will be axed with no prospect of recording personalities and events of today for the historians of tomorrow. An irreplaceable loss.

With fewer staff and the consequent reduction in the services provided by the Museum, accreditation may be

compromised, which could possibly affect its charitable status and render it ineligible for future external funding.

The Head of the Museum Services and her staff have developed a Museum that the profession is rightly proud of. Their in-depth knowledge has provided help and assistance to countless numbers of visitors and researchers both professional and lay. Their 'front of house' attitude to all who come to visit the headquarters in Wimpole Street is a superb advertisement for the BDA and the profession as a whole.

We, the Lindsay Society, ask the BDA to reconsider this proposal which under the circumstances we feel to be short sighted. A mature, honourable profession has the right to a vibrant, knowledgeable, world-class museum such as the one we are lucky enough to have. Long may it remain so.

B. Williams

Lindsay Society

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Precious heritage

Sir, the decision to reduce the BDA's support of its museum staff is deeply regrettable. The BDA Museum is a precious heritage of international repute. In recent years the staff have not only increased their support of researchers into the history of the profession, but have also been effective promoters of its good name to the general public and to visiting groups of young people – our future patients and colleagues.

Any profession worthy of such designation cherishes its history and traditions, and this is even more vital at a time when the pressures of commercialisation seem so dominant. If we value our professionalism we must value its foundations.

Such penny-pinching decisions are unworthy of a well-heeled professional association. Can we not see beyond the 'bottom line'?

D. A. McGowan
Helensburgh

*Martin Fallowfield, Chair of the BDA's Principal Executive Committee, responds:
The very valid comments raised in these two*