

BDA UPDATE

Fluoridation in Hull

The BDA has thrown its weight behind discussions which could lead to the fluoridation of public water supplies in Hull. The measures would see Hull residents join the 5.5 million people in the UK who benefit from drinking fluoridated water – whether naturally occurring or artificially topped up – at the optimal level for good teeth.

Accountability hearing

The BDA has backed calls for troubled regulator the General Dental Council (GDC) to undergo regular Parliamentary accountability hearings. In its first hearing (11 March) in front of the Commons Health Committee the GDC Chair and its Chief Executive came under unprecedented scrutiny. The Professional Standards Authority have described the GDC as worse than seven of the eight professional regulators it oversees.

Friends and Family Test

The BDA has published an open letter to the Chief Dental Officer (England), in response to potentially misleading messages sent to dentists by NHS England concerning the Friends and Family Test (FFT). The communication describes the BDA as having 'agreed' to the FFT requirement that was imposed on the profession. The BDA has questioned the value of the test to both patients and practitioners.

It is NHS England's intention that from 1 April 2015, NHS dental service providers will be required to implement the FFT – a feedback tool that supports the fundamental principle that people who use NHS funded services should have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience that can be used to improve services. The FFT test has been imposed in dentistry following the regular GDPC discussions with NHS England over efficiency savings, and accepted by the BDA in that context.

RESEARCH

PLAGUE PRESERVED IN THE DENTAL PULP OF SKELETONS

Remnants of the genetic makeup of plague bacteria have been found in the teeth of victims of the Black Death and the major plague epidemics at the end of the Iron Age.

Italian researcher Barbara Bramanti (pictured) of the Centre for Ecological and Evolutionary Synthesis (CEES) at the University of Oslo is studying the evolutionary development of the plague bacteria and comparing the genetic code of the plague bacteria during the first two pandemics. The first major pandemic was the Justinian Plague at the end of the Iron Age, which lasted for 200 years. The next apocalypse was the Black Death, a pandemic that kept coming in new waves, and lasted for 400 years.

The lymph nodes of the plague victims swelled up and transformed into black boils, where the bacteria would multiply. In many of the victims, the plague bacteria entered the bloodstream, and thus the dental pulp. Together with archaeologists, Dr Bramanti is collecting DNA samples from the teeth of 2,700 plague victims from Europe and Asia. She will also be checking the teeth of Norwegian victims.

Today there are 2,000 cases of plague annually; most of them in Madagascar and Congo. It also occurs in the deserts of North America and in large areas in Central Asia, in a wide belt from Georgia via Kazakhstan to China.

Biologists at the University of Oslo are making a giant effort to identify the relationship between climate change, rat infestations, and the many major plague epidemics throughout history, which may help predict the next plague outbreak.



Barbara Bramanti looks for remnants of old plague bacteria in a plague victim from Florence who died during the Justinian Plague in the mid-500s AD. Photo: Dr Elsa Pacciani

BDJ Open

THE *BDJ* HAS A NEW SISTER: *BDJ OPEN*

A new BDA research journal *BDJ Open* has now opened for submissions. The online journal will publish dental and oral health primary research from all disciplines via open access. This means that all articles will be freely available upon publication and can be accessed by anyone, from research scientists to practising dentists and patients all around the world.

Stephen Hancocks, Editor-in-Chief of both *BDJ* and *BDJ Open*, said: '*BDJ Open* provides us with the conduit to offer peer-reviewed,

translational research in all aspects of oral health development for the benefit of the wider dental community in particular and, of course, the world in general.'

As with all existing BDA Publications, the new journal will be published by Nature Publishing Group (NPG) on behalf of the BDA. David Bull, Global Head of Academic Journals at NPG said: 'In recent years there has been a significant rise in demand for open research from both researchers and practising dentists. To fit this need, we are pleased to announce this new journal – the latest venture in our 18 year partnership with the British Dental Association.'

More information about the new journal, including how to submit articles for consideration, can be found at: www.nature.com/bdjopen.