

and what I say can be misinterpreted. Much of the work I do with red-tops and online outlets is about prevention. It's easier to hammer those messages home through the media than to physically get them into practice. That's just how it is. The challenge comes when money is discussed.

We are the only health professionals that charge for an NHS service. For their readers, that is a big thing. They – and to be fair, a lot more on top – do not understand how expensive delivering NHS dentistry is. As it isn't free at the point of entry, they start to equate it to other areas they spend money.

For those at the other end of the spectrum, their readers are statistically more likely to know what those messages are and follow them. They may well understand that heart surgery costs in excess of £40,000 and NHS dentistry is a snip compared to that. You can reach so many different audiences through media work on different platforms, which is great for me and the BDHF.

**You have mentioned the need to keep evolving and changing. Does that apply to the way the profession communicates with patients?**

It does, and I know of more and more dentists getting on the digitally-savvy train. You have to be. I've done interviews and posted them on YouTube, which is perfect for visual learners and those who spend a lot of time online. You have

to speak to patients in a digital way.

Dentists cannot be stuck in the past believing their methods will always work. To keep on improving patient compliance you need to tailor your advice to your patients. You wouldn't email an 80-year-old patient a video – unless it's my grandpa – and likewise you probably wouldn't get too much value out of giving a 5-year-old a leaflet after talking to them in practice.

Patient compliance is about building a relationship. Pushing the recall time out to two years in some cases mean you lose that relationship and rapport, so our profession will have to become more creative with how they keep in touch with patients. I have media work, and our practice has *Wisdom*, a monthly digital magazine. There's also a lot of work gone into Software of Excellence and emails with video embedded. Dentistry, more than any other healthcare sector, is decision-led. If we can send out tailored information on amalgam to a patient with queries about it, it takes the pressure off dentists and gives us more time to treat patients. It is for me – and other dentists doing media work – to use what influence I have to get the message across that dentistry is totally preventable. We waste more than four billion pounds every year on NHS dentistry alone. Can you imagine the benefits to other areas of the NHS if that money was to be reinvested?

Interview by David Westgarth



**BOOK REVIEW**



**PATIENTS FROM HEAVEN AND OTHER PLACES**

Barrie Lawrence  
Grosvenor House Publishing Ltd  
price £8.99 pp 310  
ISBN 9781781483657

*Patients from heaven* is one of those literary pieces that any dental care professional can relate to.

It brilliantly explores Barrie Lawrence's plethora of patient experiences and stories in an equally hilarious and tasteful manner. Being a dental professional exposes us to a vast array of patients providing a wide range of wonderful and not so wonderful memories. John takes us on a journey through all the memorable patients he has seen and all the lessons he has learned, whilst also respecting patient confidentiality (and brilliantly using fictional names and clever puns).

Not only does he provide many anecdotes from the cases he has seen, he also covers many of the other issues facing professionals practising dentistry in the United Kingdom from the post-war era and the introduction of sugar rations, right through to the introduction of the National Health Service and the move from a paper-based healthcare system to one that is run digitally. Looking back at these times makes one realise how far dentistry has come in the last century. Keeping abreast of these changes, whilst also managing several busy dental practices provides further depth to the book.

As a dental practitioner one is inevitably bound to come across a whole host of interesting, delightful and fascinating characters that become etched in one's memory for a whole variety of reasons. Whether it be their warm, friendly nature, their morals/ethics or even the life experiences they share with you. It can make one's job much more satisfying, devoting part of your day to improve the oral health of such individuals.

By that same token you will inevitably come across characters that you would dread to see on your day sheet. Patients that would perhaps disagree with every intervention/treatment you suggest or just try everything imaginable to make your life difficult. Barrie discusses the patients he has seen that fit both descriptions in such a manner that proves to be an extremely entertaining read.

He also gives very frank accounts of more difficult situations that have led to complaints, legal interventions and GDC hearings. Although all the aforementioned are extremely disheartening experiences to encounter, Barrie's stories make very inspiring reading. They show that whilst these encounters can be highly stressful, it is still possible to act ethically, appropriately and with dignity, and still achieve a positive outcome. *Patients from heaven* is a delightful read.

K. MAHMOOD