

## A PERIODONTIST'S LIFE

## 'PERIO WAS THE OBVIOUS CHOICE FOR ME'



Phil Ower, 60, from Liss in Hampshire, is a specialist in periodontics and President of the British Society of Periodontology (BSP)

I'm always up at 6 am and have a good breakfast whether I feel like it or not: healthy at home, unhealthy when away. I drive to work alone but am trying to use the train more now that I have a Senior Railcard. It is an hour's drive to Briars Dental Centre in Newbury. It's good winding-down time and time to catch up with The Archers.

I don't count the hours I work in an average week but it is probably more than is good for me. I've been with the Briars 20 years this year (although I have worked in other specialist practices as well) and I've just cut the practice down to a day a week. Thursday, Fridays and some Saturdays are usually teaching days. This could be anywhere in the UK so there is often quite a lot of travelling on Wednesday and Friday nights. Mondays and Tuesdays I try and make days for working at home but also I try and schedule meetings for these days. I'm doing a lot more medico-legal work and writing now so these two days are my thinking/studying/writing days.

Over the last four years I have produced a new undergraduate (and practice-ready) textbook with my former RAF colleague Ken Eaton, *Practical periodontics*, which we're really pleased with. We thought there was a need for a useful perio textbook and we weren't

wrong – it's doing very well and is being well received.

I come from a medical background but I wasn't committed to medicine and I was good with my hands, so dentistry seemed like a good choice. My girlfriend's (now wife of 36 years) father was a pilot in the RAF so I had some insight into service life and the RAF was at the back of my mind as an alternative to general practice. I organised a visit to a nearby RAF station to talk to the RAF Dental Officer there and after showing me around he got one of his mates to take me up in a helicopter (a Gazelle I think) and that was it! I was in the RAF for 16 years and had a brilliant time, absolutely no regrets.

One person attracted me to specialising in periodontics: Bernie Kieser. I'd been a GDP (in the RAF) for about 12 years and was doing my MGDSRCS which involved a lot of CPD. I heard Bernie speak a couple of times and he opened my eyes to the importance and fascination of perio. Like a lot of GDPs perio was a bit of a mystery to me but Bernie made me think about it completely differently. After the MGDS I had the opportunity to do specialist training and perio was the obvious choice. I trained at the Eastman under Bernie and when I left the RAF in 1996 I went to work with him in practice. At the same time I started teaching with my late and dear friend Graham Smart who had also been one of Bernie's protégés. Bernie and Graham were both close friends and colleagues and between them they shaped my professional life. It was quite rough in 2009 when they both died within three months of each other.

Within periodontology my main interest is minimally invasive therapy and the conservative management of the diseased root surface, as well as emphasising the patient's role in disease control. These were also Bernie's main areas of interest so I've inherited this mantle from him I guess. In the 80s and 90s he was strongly criticised for his unorthodox views but the evidence is now proving him correct so I want to keep reminding the profession of these very important principles.

I joined the BSP about 25 years ago and volunteered (contrary to my military instincts) to be the Commercial Liaison Officer which got me on to the Council. I was very surprised to be asked to be President but I did think about it; I had seen how much the Presidency could take over colleagues' lives but it was inevitable that I would accept. The BSP has always had this great tradition of alternating academics and clinicians in the post of President, reflecting the diversity of our membership. It's a huge honour to be asked and I'm trying hard not to disappoint!

Every President has a bit of an agenda I suppose and if pushed I would say that mine is to try and do more as a Society for clinicians in practice; I meet them on weekly basis and know that we could be doing more to advise and assist, hence the development of the GPG\* and e-GPG for instance. This is all part of a concerted effort to make the BSP more relevant to the public, the profession and industry. About three years ago we set up a small strategic planning group comprised of past, current and future

presidents and representatives from our early career group (who are the future of the BSP) to develop a five-year plan. We've had huge support from our industrial partners that has enabled us to deliver on this plan. We've all worked hard on this but none more so than Iain Chapple, immediate past President, who has really pushed us. We have a lot to thank him for. In May the BSP has a really exciting public awareness campaign planned which we want general practices to get involved with – watch this space!

I put juggling my day job with my other roles down to careful planning, a paper diary that doesn't crash and my wife Ghilaine who organises my life meticulously. Ghilaine is trained as a lawyer but for the last decade or so has been Conference and Events Manager for the BSP.

I don't really have any time off during the week. When I work from home Ghilaine and I have separate offices so we meet for lunch in the kitchen and communicate during the day by email! When at home I always take my two dogs out for a good long walk in the middle of the day.

If I'm out of the house, I usually get home about 7 pm unless I'm away but when working at home we try and stop work about 6. I relax by reading and listening to music. I'm rediscovering my huge CD and vinyl collection which sounds completely different on my new audio equipment which Ghilaine got me for my 60th. We both love cooking and entertaining, and have a passion for live performance, driven I suspect by our children (aged 29 and 27) who both work in the arts.

During the week, I am usually in bed about 10 pm.

*\*The Good Practitioners Guide to Periodontology (GPG) is an updated version of the Young Practitioners Guide, also available in e-learning format, and includes a revision of the Basic Periodontal Examination (BPE) guidelines. See [www.bsperi.org.uk](http://www.bsperi.org.uk).*

INTERVIEW BY KATE QUINLAN