

# Valedictory address

Stuart Johnston

BDA President 2016/17

My presidential year now comes to its end, though it seems such a short time ago that I stood here last. I remember then thanking the BDA for the opportunities that it had made available to me and the satisfaction in the outcomes achieved. Well yet again I am in debt to the BDA. The honour of a presidential year is not to be underestimated, the experience of Conference as President takes the event to another level for you, but you are certainly very busy. It is a not to be forgotten event.

As President you have the ability to set your own agenda to a considerable extent. Fortunately, as I had just retired from practice, I was able to attend the vast majority of events to which I was invited. My sincere apologies to those whose events I could not attend due to diary clashes. Part of the workload I chose to carry on Nairn Wilson's initiative in visiting and talking to students around the UK. At this stage, could I add my thanks to the deans and tutors for facilitating these visits. I also talked to the foundation dentists groups visiting the BDA, encouraging membership and participation in the future of the profession. I heard it succinctly put by an American dentist reminding new graduates that to treat dentistry as a job rather than a profession puts your future at risk. The more I think about this the more truth I see. We must continue to guard ourselves against being dragged down by systems of provision that can demoralise and distract us from our professional responsibility.

To get back to the BDA. Now is the time to thank Alison Magee, the guardian of the President and the Presidents' diary, a source of good advice and someone who will gently steer you back on track if you start to wander off. All the Past Presidents here will fully understand what a difference having such support makes to your year. It would not have been the same without Alison's support.

After my few years' absence from 64 Wimpole Street and our other offices, it was good to see the staff again and I would like to recognise the contribution that they all make towards our Association. In those few years of absence from the Principal Executive Committee, Country Councils, General Dental Practice Committee, Community Dental Service and the other committees and groups, it took me a while to catch up and get to know the new faces. Some issues had moved on and some were, depressingly, actually worse, despite the best efforts. In fact, once the shiny froth of positive official spin from our government and regulator is gently blown away, and that does not take much effort, what remains is not pretty. Notional consultations are no substitute for genuine insightful management

so train stations. I have even had the once in my lifetime experience of going backwards through airport security when the lateness of the Easyjet flight made the trip pointless, as I had missed the event. I am also back as a regular on Great Western Railway, up and down to London; I had actually quite missed my train trips. What has been consistent though when I arrived, was the warmth of the welcome I received from the officers and members at the branch and section events that I attended. The nature of the events has varied considerably from the relatively small CPD event, to study days and associated dinners, gala dinners, to the legendary Middlesex and Herts continuing grand tour of Europe social and educational event. Occasionally there is some time between meetings. I was fortunate to get some 'me'



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and implementation. An NHS that piles ever-increasing pressure upon performers is unsustainable. That higher and higher levels of output are expected, for ever and ever reducing financial returns, is unacceptable. And couple all of this with the shifting of risk onto the professionals themselves, and it is plain to see that something is badly wrong. What is truly amazing is the continuing commitment of our profession to try and keep it all working for patients. However, something is out of balance and I wonder where the future for NHS dentistry lies.

I have travelled extensively during my year across the UK and have become quite an expert on regional airports and even more

time in Belfast and see the Titanic exhibition, which is really spectacular. What has been truly amazing about my UK travels has been the level of service of local members to make these events work. It has been my privilege throughout my travels to have the opportunity to thank the members and officers for their commitment to the BDA.

Internationally, I attended the FDI World Dental Federation Conference with the BDA team and colleagues from other national dental associations around the world. Here I met with many old friends from my time with the World Dental Federation, especially as chairman of Dental Practice Committee, then moving on to the American

Dental Association, New Zealand Dental Association, Indian Dental Association, Irish Dental Association and Australian Dental Association. The major issue for all seems to be in maintaining the engagement of our new graduates in the associations. Another common issue was the rise in corporate provision.

My presidency seems to have been timely in respect of the consideration of the Minamata Convention by the EU. It has allowed me to attend the Kings' seminar on

the pathways for a phase down of amalgam and to pontificate to the Principal Executive Committee, General Dental Practice Committee and anyone else who would listen about my mastermind subject, so it is now time I must leave the thorny issue in your hands. I suspect many will be breathing a sigh of relief at my departure today.

The tolerance of my wife, Marian, has been tested a little; she had got used to me being at home and not spending so much time in front of a computer and, all of a sudden, it's

like the old days when I'm not at home so often and distracted by the computer when I am home. So my sincere thanks to her for the support she has given me.

It is time now to hand over office to Peter Dyer, to wish him well and finally to stand back from active participation in the BDA's affairs. My sincere thanks to all of you for the opportunities the BDA has provided to me and the honour bestowed on me in being your president. ■

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