

COMMENT

Letters to the editor

Send your letters to the Editor, *British Dental Journal*, 64 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8YS. 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.

Editorial decisions

Diminishing credibility

Sir, the cartoonish characterisations of the current covers of the *BDJ* [Volume 223, published July–December 2017] serve to diminish the credibility of the contents of the journal and demean the dental profession. For a serious academic journal, more appropriate cover subject matter might portray some of the history of dentistry's rise from barber-surgeons to the current and future status of the profession as a scientifically-based health discipline. Dentistry should not be portrayed in a discreditable comedic manner, with its reputation already much diminished as a cosmetic calling.

G. Sperber, Canada

The Editor-in-Chief responds: I thank Professor Sperber for his opinion on the cover series. I have always been open to receiving and publishing criticism of the BDJ's content as I believe this is the best way to progress debate. The editorial team including our amazing art editor go to great lengths to choose our cover series taking into account visual impact, relevance, originality and a host of other considerations. Previous examples that have had particular impact include the humorous cartoon series to celebrate

the 2012 London Olympics and the unique watercolours commemorating the beginning of the First World War. The originals of this latter series having been purchased from the artist and are now on permanent show at the Army Dental Corps Museum.

As readers will be aware, the series referred to was based on references to oral health, teeth and dentistry as portrayed in literature and have been commissioned by us with detailed briefs to the artist. As such Professor Sperber's comments need to be set in the context that these literary references portray dentistry and oral health as others see them, not as we see ourselves – a crucially important difference. If we are to progress as a profession we need to be objective about our existing, wider image.

Professor Sperber's is the only negative comment we have received on the series in comparison to many positive and supportive reactions, especially on social media, where one reaction was 'Fantastic cover art. This makes me so proud of my profession!' It is in this context that I wanted to respond since I strongly believe that the reputation of the BDJ far from being diminished is in fact enhanced by such embellishments. I am sure that this is part of the reason why the BDJ is, by the measure of Altmetrics, the number one most talked about dental journal in the world and from our own statistics read in over 190 countries.

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Pathetic jokes

Sir, I am writing to you to complain about the content of *BDJ* Volume 223 No. 12, published on 22 December 2017, which contained inaccurate yet plausible content that could mislead and misinform readers of this journal.

The Editorial set the tone for this edition by reporting the use of robots to perform implants in China. This is within the bounds of possibility as was the next item regarding

data transmitted from electronic toothbrushes which could lead to a Home Dental Check system that could determine whether a visit to the dentist was required. There were two other 'developments' that bordered on the edge of believable (Uberdent and Airrotor).

Spoof letters and fake news articles regarding various aspects of Christmas and its relevance to CQC, Christmas cards, whisky, cakes and Russian hacking in BDA elections followed. These were all very tongue in cheek (forgive the pun). There followed what I presumed was the serious part of the journal dealing with electronic records, oral and maxillofacial trauma, and burnout in dental students. My problem with the first (flippant) part of the journal is that I now had to ask myself, 'do I believe that there is burnout in dental students with all the attendant suicide problems or is this one of their jokes?'

My feeling, if you have not discerned it so far, is that there is a place for spoof articles and bogus reporting but a serious professional journal is not the forum for such. Anything you read in a professional publication should be true, trusted and believable and not subject to doubt because of some pathetic jokes inserted by the editorial staff. All that was required from the Editor was 'Happy Christmas to all our members and a plague on the GDC'.

A. J. Lawrence, by email

The Editor-in-Chief responds: I am sorry to read of Dr Lawrence's disapproval of the mixed content of our Christmas issue. We made sure that all 'spoof' content was carefully signposted so as not to mislead readers. From the many positive responses that we received the Yuletide content was appreciated and its purpose of spreading a smile or two and injecting some humorous relief at a time when there is much gloom and doom in the world of dentistry

