



As I write these words it seems appropriate to reflect on the old year passing and the challenges facing us all in 1999. The high-point of the year for me was the BDA Conference in Harrogate. The build-up and preparation in the early months of 1998 culminated in a very successful conference. Many people commented on the attractive scientific programme, the positive buzz of excitement in the exhibition halls and the overall competence of the arrangements. Congratulations to all the 1,910 people who made it such a success.

In a way this has parallels for the whole profession, because 1998 could surely be seen as a preparatory period before the changes which lie ahead for dentistry in the UK. All branches of dentistry have been involved in the formation of Oral Health Advisory Groups (OHAGs). Initial contacts are at this moment being made with the new Chairs and chief executives of Primary Care Groups (PCGs), while finishing touches are being made to Oral Health Strategies ready for their incorporation into Health Improvement Programmes (HIPs). As if these acronyms are not sufficient, the DoH has found the funds to launch the Personal Dental Service (PDS) pilot schemes and, where access to NHS dentistry is difficult, grants to dentists are being made under the Investing in Dentistry (IiD) programme.

Corporate Bodies continue to gobble up some of the larger practices. It is difficult to estimate, but about 600 dentists must now be involved in one way or another with these groups. Is it a development to be welcomed? Clearly the well-attended debate in Harrogate accepted the advantages of serious third party investment in dental practices. There are obviously reservations, but the profession as a whole waits with bated breath to see the direction which will be taken by a certain High Street pharmacist who has accepted the challenge.

It was with great sadness that the era of general anaesthesia in routine dental practice came to a close. In the light of technical advances in this speciality and in life support there was a certain inevitability to its demise. However, our profession acted as midwife to the birth of general anaesthesia in the last century and millions of people have good cause to be grateful for our endeavours in this area.

As one door shuts another opens and it was with a real sense of anticipation that I opened the first supplement on Evidence-Based Dentistry. This topic was in danger of becoming a bogeyman to the average dentist, but Mike Grace and Alan Lawrence and their team deserve much appreciation for the first issue. Alan Lawrence's leader explains how dentists can use the internet and other electronic tools for research — a fine example of how information technology can work both for us and the greater benefit of our patients. We await future issues with great interest.

Will 1999 bring progress on the vexed issue of water fluoridation? If the Government is really ready to move from pious thoughts and platitudes on the matter of health inequalities then there must be movement towards a more robust demand for this public health measure.

As we consider all these problems and issues of concern for the future it becomes more and more apparent that we need a strong professional association to represent our views. I believe the BDA is rising to the challenge. A new Governing Council and committee structure is ready for implementation, which we hope will provide a framework for a more responsive and dynamic leadership in the future. Even so, I believe the current leaders of our Association are as committed and capable as never before. We owe them and our staff a great debt of gratitude for all their efforts.

Finally the Branches, Sections and the Groups are of course the very life-blood of the BDA. To their secretaries, chairmen and women and other officers may I record our deep appreciation for all their time, work and efforts on behalf of the profession.

On a personal note, Pat joins with me in thanking everyone for the exceptionally kind way we have been treated as we travel about visiting those meetings and events which we are able to attend. Best wishes to all of you for a healthy, successful and prosperous 1999.

Geoff Garnett
BDA President