BDJ readership survey

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Over the summer, *BDJ* readers were surveyed about the *BDJ* as part of a series of *BDJ* surveys conducted since 1992. As well as assessing general views about the *BDJ*, the survey also aimed to discover how successful the 1998 *BDJ* redesign had been in incorporating reader's views from earlier surveys. The findings from the 1999 survey showed that the *BDJ* and *BDA News* continue to be the most read dental publications. Readers turn to the *BDJ* before any other UK dental journal for finding a job and reports on research. The full results of the survey are reported below.

Past *BDJ* readership surveys were carried out in 1992, 1995 and 1997, and the main conclusions from all three surveys showed that the readership of the *BDJ* has been increasing over that time, that scientific papers and case reports had increased in relevance and popularity, and that practitioners wanted more 'how to do it' articles while academic dentists wanted the scientific credibility of the *BDJ* to improve.^{1,2,3}

However, the 1997 survey also revealed that academic and practitioner readers felt that the *BDJ* was basically published for the other group (academics felt it was mainly published for practitioners, and practitioners felt it was published for academics).

As a result of this the editorial philosophy of the *BDJ* was altered and this was reflected in the design. In essence the journal was split into sections, and the practice and research sections were specifically aimed at each particular audience. Thus the latest readership survey was trying to ascertain whether the publishing strategy adopted had been successful.

The latest survey was conducted through a postal questionnaire, and as before was sent to 1010 randomly selected readers in June 1999, asking questions used in the earlier surveys as well as new questions about web use and the new *BDJ* supplement, *Evidence-based Dentistry*. The characteristics of the respondents by age, sex and year of qualification matched the BDA's general membership structure suggesting that the

sample was representative. Given the sample sizes in the present and 1997 surveys, changes since 1997 needed to be 8% or more for statistical significance. The data was analysed by year of qualification, sex and field of practice but few statistically significant differences were found.

Dental journal reading generally

Members were asked about their reading habits for 11 publications. As in 1997, the most read journals were the *BDJ* (90%) and *BDA News* (87%) with *Dental Practice* (60%), *The Probe* (48%) and *Dental Business* (35%) following. However, the survey was sent to people who automatically receive the *BDJ* and *BDA News* so the findings show how the *BDJ* is used relative to other journals that may not be received.

Overall, fewer respondents are reading as many publication issues as they had in

1997, which suggests that readers are becoming more selective — perhaps looking for specific articles rather than reading every issue of a particular publication. The World Wide Web may also be having an effect on journal reading though this has yet to be assessed.

Delving further into journal reading, we asked readers which journals they choose for different topics — giving a predefined list of 11 topics and 10 dental journals. Table 1 shows the percentage of readers choosing the *BDJ* first in 1999 together with the findings since 1992 for comparison. The *BDJ* is chosen first for six of the 11 topics — most notably for 'finding a job', 'reports on research' and 'recruiting staff'.

Dental Update leads the *BDJ* by 1% for the 1999 first choice for 'keeping up to date clinically', *Dental Business* is readers' first choice for financial management while *The Dentist* is chosen first for practice management articles.

Subject coverage

When members were asked if more or less *BDJ* coverage was needed of 17 subjects, the majority thought there should be more coverage of 'practical clinical techniques' and 'cosmetic dentistry' but less of 'non-dental topics' and 'community dental health'. This is consistent with views since 1992. Readers also thought coverage of UK meetings/events and abstracts from other journals was about right.

Table 1	Journals considered to be most useful for each topic					
	Percentage choosing <i>BDJ</i> first				1999 1st choice if not <i>BDJ</i>	%
	1992	1995	1997	1999		
Finding a job	100%	99%	98%	97%		
Keeping up to date clinically	22	41	57	40	<i>Dental Update</i>	41
Political/employment topics	11	17	26	31	<i>BDA News</i>	47
Recruiting staff	99	97	84	88		
Oral health promotion/policy	n/a	44	50	53		
Practice management	3	8	6	10	<i>The Dentist</i>	26
Financial management	1	8	6	10	<i>Dental Business</i>	33
Staff training	36	29	27	26		
Reports on research	87	86	94	89		
Opinion/debate/letters	n/a	57	66	69		
Product news	n/a	16	20	27	<i>Dental Practice</i>	31

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Table 2 *BDJ* section reading, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999

	Always read				Sometimes read				Never read				% useful 1999
	'92	'95	'97	'99	'92	'95	'97	'99	'92	'95	'97	'99	
Case reports	39%	52%	45%	41%	56%	57%	54%	58%	5%	2%	1%	2%	71%
News	55	54	54	53	42	44	42	44	3	2	4	3	66
Research papers	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	71	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	60
Letters to the editor	56	52	50	48	39	46	46	47	5	3	4	5	56
Education	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	69	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	55
Leader	36	31	34	36	55	59	60	58	9	11	6	6	39
Classified advertisements	3	38	37	36	52	49	52	55	12	13	11	9	55
Abstracts	19	23	21	27	60	63	63	65	21	14	16	8	57
Guest leaders	n/a	19	23	21	n/a	67	68	70	n/a	14	9	9	31
Product advertisements	n/a	n/a	10	16	n/a	n/a	74	72	n/a	n/a	16	12	41
Trade news	15	17	16	18	62	63	68	68	23	20	16	14	42
Book reviews	11	17	12	13	63	64	69	73	26	18	19	14	41
Obituaries	n/a	28	26	23	n/a	51	62	59	n/a	20	12	18	23
Interviews with editor	10	11	11	10	66	68	69	66	14	21	20	24	23

Dental Business and Evidence-based Dentistry

Dental Business, the quarterly business supplement to the *BDJ*, was launched in 1995 and readers were first questioned about it in 1997. The 1999 survey shows that overall 60% of people surveyed stated they read *Dental Business* which compares well with the figure of 63% in 1997, although the number stating they read the whole of each issue has decreased from 24% in 1997 to 14% in 1999. This finding of reduced readership for the whole of a publication is general throughout most of the other dental publications and may be a reflection on the fact that people are reading less of each publication in 1999 compared with 1997.

The readership of *Dental Business* still consists more of men than women and GDPs more than non-GDPs (the latter finding is hardly surprising). Interestingly the readers request more coverage of every subject in *Dental Business* other than the Investors in People award and interviews.

Evidence-based Dentistry (EBD) aims to

alert clinicians to important advances in dentistry through summarised biomedical articles which are then commented on by experts. This survey is the first to ask readers about their use of *EBD*. Readership of *EBD* is quite high (75%) and 40% want more frequent publication. *EBD* is read by more non-GDPs than any other subgroup. Additionally, a high percentage (86%) of *EBD* readers are prepared to use it to help make treatment decisions.

BDJ reading

Turning specifically to the *BDJ*, readers were asked how often they read 14 *BDJ* sections and to rank sections for usefulness. The sections that readers turn to most are 'Case reports', 'News' and 'Research Papers', which are also the sections the majority of respondents found useful. The high use of the *BDJ* for research papers may follow from the *BDJ*'s redesign mentioned earlier which took into account the findings from earlier *BDJ* surveys that showed academic readers wanting more research from their fields while GDP readers wanted more

research of direct relevance to general practice. Subgroup analysis showed, predictably, that younger dentists tend to read the classifieds more while older dentists more frequently read the leader and the obituaries. Articles on research and education are more frequently read by non-GDPs than GDPs. Table 2 shows the findings in more detail though subgroup analysis has been omitted because of a lack of significant differences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, does the 1999 readership survey tell us whether the redesign has achieved its objective? The fact that the *BDJ* has retained its readership in the current declining climate and continues to be the most read dental journal would suggest it has.

- 1 Morris S. Readership survey results. *Br Dent J* 1993; 174: 144-145.
- 2 Desmond, J. Results of the readers' survey. *Br Dent J* 1995; 180: 193-194.
- 3 Montgomery, J. *BDJ* readership survey. *Br Dent J* 1998; 184: 563-564.