

FOCUS AWARDS 2002



Five innovative dental practices took a trip to the Royal College of Surgeons to meet the Minister for Health David Lammy at the recent BDA/DoH Focus Awards.

The event celebrated innovation in dental patient care by awarding trophies and prize money of £750 to four finalists and £2000 to the winning practice.

This was only the second year for the Focus Awards and already they are setting high standards for patient care. As the minister said, 'they are helping to provide new and higher benchmarks for dental practices across the country'. In fact this year's winning practice had been nominated for the award by one of their patients. Applicants had each completed a nomination form specifying their innovations in patient care under five broad headings. For some practices the application process had been driven by the team, for others it was a way for the practice to achieve recognition for the work the staff had done in improving the services at the practice.

The finalists came from York, Sunderland, Huddersfield, Nottingham and Northallerton and the enthusiasm of the teams helped the event to go with a swing.



Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, David Lammy presented the awards for innovation in dental patient care.



John Renshaw, Chairman of the BDA Executive Board and a judge on the Focus Awards panel, talked through the innovations by all finalists and explained what was special about each practice. The other judges were Mike Grace, Editor of the BDJ, Liz Phelps of NACAB, Dame Margaret Seward, Chief Dental Officer for England, Professor Nairn Wilson, President of the GDC and Ian Wylie, Chief Executive, BDA.

The minister took the opportunity to speak to the dental profession, assuring that there should be 'nothing less than a complete change in the way in which complete dentistry is arranged in the NHS'. Part of this includes a new remuneration method and more emphasis on disease prevention, amongst other initiatives. The Minister continued by describing how he saw dentistry within the NHS developing and he recognized that NHS dentistry 'needs to get better for dentists'. This involves making the NHS a model employer, offering model careers, improving staff morale and developing its management skills.

David Lammy acknowledged that the 'highest quality of dental care is already available to patients, but there are exceptional dental practices and outstanding members of the dental team who ...have demonstrated innovation ...for NHS patients.' All the finalists showed that they are ahead of the game when it comes to innovative ways of making their practices patient-centred, but what are they doing to make their patients think so highly of them?

EDUCATING, INFORMING AND SUPPORTING

Of course every practice has a different patient-base and so each practice had adapted their services to uniquely match the needs of their particular patients, but there were some common themes and ways of approaching patients that the finalists had in common.

All finalists had given a lot of thought to educating their patients of all ages and abilities. One of the judges' favourites was the loan to local schools and community groups of miniature dental suites so that children could dress up and play at being dentists. Another practice has decorated their reception so that it can double as an 'education room' where they display leaflets and posters to get key messages across.

Patients like to be kept informed about treatment costs and options but they can often be nervous of discussing these and their worries about treatment with dentists. The finalists had addressed these issues in varying ways. One practice has a specially dedicated Treatment Advisor who speaks with every patient needing treatment, to discuss their options in a friendly and

...and the finalists were...

Clock House Dental, York
Lindley Dental Centre, Huddersfield
Strelley Dental Clinic, Nottinghamshire
Wessington Way Dental Practice, Sunderland
Zetland House Clinic, Northallerton.

The winners were: Wessington Way Dental Practice

relaxed atmosphere, taking as much time as the patient needs. Another practice gives patients a written estimate of how much the work will cost. They can take this home, allowing them to think about the options in their own time.

Some of the practices felt that any treatment is only as good as the follow-up, and so a member of staff telephones patients at home after their visit to see that all is well and to answer any resulting queries. One of the practices has embraced the advantages offered by the internet and has a website with several facilities for patients. These include advice on what to do if a patient thinks he or she has a dental emergency and help in deciding if they need to see a dentist immediately.

REMOVING BARRIERS

This continued to be an area from last year where practices are making big efforts to make their services as accessible as possible. Practices had addressed physical barriers by installing split-level reception desks and ramps to allow wheelchairs and buggies easy access.

Another practice had tackled communication barriers by adapting patient questionnaires so that those with learning disabilities and communication problems could still have a say in the services offered. Many of the finalists offer at least one member of staff who is trained in the use of sign language.

ASKING PATIENTS

Feedback from patients has become an ever more important aspect of keeping services patient-centred. All of the finalists addressed this in their work in one way or another. This ranged from surveys, questionnaires, comments books and suggestions boxes to one-to-one interviews with patients and in one instance a special

The Focus Awards is a joint initiative between the Department of Health and the British Dental Association. It was set up to recognise and celebrate the innovative patient-focused projects being carried out across England.

patient's forum. This way the patients have the opportunity to tell the practice what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong; where they could improve and what they could do to make the whole dental practice experience as enjoyable as possible.

These are just some of the unique ideas that the finalists have put in place, so the *BDJ* will be featuring different finalists in the up and coming issues with a focus on each practice in turn. These will explore what they each did in detail and where their inspiration has come from for all their ideas. The series will begin with the winners of the Focus Awards 2002: Wessington Way Dental Practice, Sunderland.

Naomi Davis

Focus Awards 2003

John Renshaw, Chairman of the BDA Executive Board announced that next year's Focus Awards will be bigger, brighter and better.

There will be even more patient focus. The Focus Awards 2003 will see the introduction of new categories, and more patient involvement in nominating, engaging patients, letting them know that patients can contribute to rewarding their dentist. The Awards will be extended to include innovations from practices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

How the practices got involved

In order to participate, each entrant had to submit a nomination form specifying the innovations under the categories given below. Any practice that had applied last year was not allowed to use the same innovations in their application.

- Patient's experiences contacting the practice/clinic before, during and after treatment.
- Patient's experiences whilst in the reception or waiting area
- Patient's experiences during clinical treatment
- General communication with the patients
- Any other patient-focused innovation



The team of the Wessington Way Dental Practice, Sunderland. The winners of the Focus Awards 2002