

# A day in UK dentistry

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From sunrise in East Anglia to sunset off the west of Northern Ireland every working day dentistry happens.

The sizzling of bacon in Lowestoft, most easterly point of the UK, heralds the arrival of the new day. Breakfasts destined to fuel dental teams throughout the morning are prepared, eaten, missed, gulped, dropped or left for the dog.

Practices are gradually opened up, doors unlocked, inner-city shutters raised, heating put on, air-conditioning adjusted depending on time of year. Cleaners are said goodbye to, surfaces checked, surfaces re-cleaned. 'Tsking' noises are made at 37 of the departing cleaners. Out of their earshot.

Traffic jams. Dentists are delayed. Patients are on time. Further traffic jams, patients are delayed, dentists' time is wasted. In Doncaster, Paul Frobisher falls off the rocking horse at nursery school and gets rushed to the nearest practice, deciduous 'A's in the teacher's hand.

Twelve dental students get 'referred' in their medicine and surgery vivas. The Parliamentary Personal Assistant of an opposition MP is given the task of formulating a question for the Prime Minister on NHS dental provision. Over 3,567mm of tooth movement are recorded from removable appliances alone. Three complete lower dentures are dropped while being cleaned and break in bathroom basins not filled with the recommended levels of protective water. In Devon a housewife subjected to an unexpected extraction takes the whole of the rest of the day to recover in a darkened room back at home.

Lunch covers the period from 11.45am, due to an early start to the practice day in Bognor Regis bringing the need for sustenance forward, to 2.55pm in Fife, where an unanticipated surgical removal of the roots of an upper second molar (one of 103 nationwide that day) causes the delay, as well as a good deal of other inconvenience. In the meantime, you could be deafened by the popping of 16,743 Tupperware (or their near equivalent) plastic boxes. From these, as from thousands of triangular plastic packages and hundreds of slightly more quaint, carefully folded greaseproof paper

parcels emerge 187,410 slices of bread, mostly white, the rest being predominantly wholemeal and brown with a minority of rye, soda and sourdough.

Spread with a tide of tuna and mayonnaise, sweetcorn relish, cheese, pickle, tomato ketchup, jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter, chutney, and supplemented with beef, ham, chicken, turkey, venison (predominantly private practices in the Borders), left-over lamb and in an unusual case, tripe, they are consumed in silence, over newspapers or chomped in sociable pairs or groups.

Before the afternoon session commences 35,842 yoghurt cartons previously containing a staggering 42 varieties of flavours and various sizes of 'bits' have been pedal-binned, where they have been joined by 45,091 empty crisp bags (16 flavours).

By mid-afternoon the day is beginning to pall a bit. Watches are checked. Errors are

been rewarded by stickers, colouring sheets and parental approbation.

Over 57 miles of toothpaste will have been squeezed, 2.3 of them by dedicated oral hygiene professionals. Meanwhile 78,918 toothbrushes will have been driven along 19 motorways in the trucks of just one supermarket chain. Rinsing out has accounted for three Olympic sized swimming pools of water, fizzed pink by the equivalent of six full lockers of mouthwash tablets.

Early evening sees the departure from a large Yorkshire spa-town hotel of representatives from a 'major player' in the dental distribution business. Claimed to be the largest sales development strategy meeting of its kind held north of the Watford Gap, it has been responsible for the use of two complete A1 flip-charts, 108 cups of filter coffee, 87 cappuccinos, 18 café lattes and 76 teas (three herbal, two strawberry, one lemon).

Come bedtime, some won't sleep, troubled by crown margins that could have fitted better or profit margins that didn't fit at

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made. Most are spotted, some are glossed over, a few are genuinely missed. Thirty-eight incidents will become the basis of future dento-legal cases, two of which won't emerge for a further eight and fifteen years respectively, when a broken endodontic instrument and a root perforated by a post crown show up on radiographs of infrequent attenders.

Very soon the number of fillings placed will be nearing the average, the number of impressions for partial dentures slightly up on the previous day but slightly down on the one prior to that and the total of implants implanted higher than this time last year. Eight hundred and twenty seven under 5's will have steadfastly refused treatment, 15,203 superior behaviours will have

all. Twenty-two, ironically, will suffer toothache, only six of whom will receive any sympathy at all from their respective partners. 'Serves you right if you ask me'. Grunt. Turn over. Eight discover that whatever it is that they tell their patients to do in the event of oral pain, doesn't work and have a wretched night reflecting on a need for a change of advice.

About two and half hours after the last light goes out in the most westerly district of County Fermanagh, the next wave of rashers hits the fat in the dental frying pans of East Anglia...have a good day.

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