

*Glancing down the list of pupils who had left last summer and gone off to university only one had chosen dentistry...*

## Starting out – again

You may well be familiar with the Noel Coward song lyrics ‘Don’t put your daughter on the stage Mrs. Worthington’ but would you put your daughter, or son, into dentistry? And more particularly, would you do so now. Indeed are you doing so now?

We are frequently asked by youngsters, and sometimes not-so-youngsters as to whether or not we think dentistry is a good profession to go into. It is a thought-provoking challenge and the initial answer is often coloured by the day we’re having, or have just had in the surgery. In the case of a bad day with one hundred and one problems, interruptions, restorations that don’t fit and patients being awkward, the answer is likely to a guarded one. Conversely, a good day with plenty of satisfactory treatment plans under the belt and a succession of happy patients will find us more outgoing and ebullient, encouraging the enquirer to at least a further exploration of the possibilities.

But what do we really think? Is it as worth ‘going into’ as it was, or seemed to be when we first took the plunge? I ask the question as a result of a string of experiences last month; hosting the private dentistry awards at the Café Royal, lecturing and having dinner at a BDA Section in west London and then carrying out the pleasant duty of presenting the prizes at the senior awards evening at my old school. Glancing down the list of pupils who had left last summer and gone off to university only one had chosen dentistry and as I sat on the same stage where I had years previously accepted my own prize of a dictionary that I still use regularly, I pondered on how I’d answer the question if anyone asked me later in the evening.

In the event no one did, which was probably just as well because I suspect that in order to be fair-minded I would have had to have been quite equivocal. On the one hand the bright atmosphere and optimistic future plans advanced by the diners at the private

dentistry event would have propelled me along to confident heights. Perhaps that was natural given that the practitioners and their teams were obviously doing ‘OK’ if they were there in the first place. On the other hand, the somewhat low key, apprehensive and confused feeling about the prospects for NHS practice voiced at the lecture meeting would have made me wonder before wholeheartedly advocating a life in the tooth and gum department. Yet why should that be?

Surely the prospects should look prosperous here too. The government is the paymaster to the extent of some £1.8 billion a year to NHS dentistry, which is still far greater than the amount spent privately in the UK. While the BDA have currently withdrawn from talks with the Department of Health, as widely publicised in Lester Ellman’s letter in December, as with all discussions they will need to be taken up again at some point, and before that comes the opportunity for each of us to air our views and thoughts. Some readers will remember the ‘new contract’ watershed of the early 1990s, and there can be no doubt that whatever the outcome this time, it will lead to an equally significant shift in the provision of dental care in the UK.

So, would you put your daughter on the dental stage Mrs. Worthington? Do you still want to be on it yourself? This year, or more specifically, the coming days and weeks will be the time to let your voice be heard. Tell your local and national representatives and let your association know what you think because it is a time for a crucial change of scenery and it’s up to you as to whether or not you’re going to be in the next act and who you’re going to be playing.

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