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*What's the point in going to a conference? What's the point in even holding one?*

## What's the point?

The television comedian and actor Harry Enfield created an endearing if slightly off-putting adolescent character called Kevin. Clothed in baggy tee-shirt, huge jeans, a back-to-front baseball cap and with his face all but hidden from view by long lank hair, his invariable teenage protest to every request made of him is 'it's so unfair' or 'do I have to?' or 'what's the point?'

It's not just Kevin with his pubescent sense of injustice who asks what the point is. As a profession it is one we often pose in relation to attending conferences, and with this Association's annual meeting just days away in Glasgow it seems a pertinent time to ponder such a query. What's the point in going to a conference? What's the point in even holding one?

Although attendance numbers have been gradually growing in recent years, anticipated to top the 3,000 mark in Glasgow, this would still represent less than 1 in 10 of the dentists currently on the Dentists Register, which is not by any stretch of the imagination a stunning endorsement of professional support. That is a pity.

So, what is the point? Quite apart from being expertly and professionally organised, coordinated nowadays by the BDA's own in-house team, such events provide opportunities to hear world class national and international speakers give presentations on a wide variety of topics of direct relevance to today's practice. All of which sessions provide the opportunity to rack-up valuable hours of verifiable CPD.

Then there is the trade exhibition with recent innovations and new products from manufacturers and suppliers. Plus the trip is tax deductible and provides an opportunity to take the whole team away

for a practice-building experience. So far, so good.

However, there is a point of arguably much greater importance than all of these. It is the ability to associate with peers. Colleagues frequently tell me that however much they are drawn to attend meetings or courses by the name and reputation of the speaker, or the perceived potential value of the topic, the most important parts of the day are invariably the tea and coffee breaks and lunchtime. Why? Because those are the opportunities to talk to other practitioners, to discover what they think about the speaker and the topic but then, most often, to move on to discuss a range of other matters. Such times of association become small oases of salvation, when we find that contrary to what we thought, we are not the only ones on the planet to suffer what turn out to be similar problems. They are times when recalled back in the surgery help to decrease the stress and potential loneliness of the isolation of practice.

The need to fulfil all these functions, and others, will ensure that meetings and in particular BDA Conferences will continue to be organised, run and enjoyed by those who choose to attend.

So, what's the point? The point is that in the same way that we all sooner or later climb out of the bewildering maelstrom of hormones that make the character of Kevin such a nightmare of negativity, so too should we take the opportunity to reassess the reasons why we do, or do not, attend conferences and meetings more regularly. And if, like Kevin, you are still minded to respond with 'do I have to?' the answer, like it or not, is 'yes'!

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