



## DENTAL THERAPISTS CALL FOR JOINED-UP THINKING ON CHILD DENTAL HEALTH

The healthcare profession and the government need to break down key barriers if we are to ensure 'efficient and effective' future dental care for the nation's children, according to Fiona Sandom, president of the British Association of Dental Therapists (BADT), who was speaking in response to a call for a national oral health programme by dentist and Conservative MP, Sir Paul Beresford.

The MP led a debate in Parliament on 3 February on child dental health. During the debate, he claimed a targeted national oral health programme – rather than a sugar tax – was needed to tackle the rate of children's tooth decay.

He said a fluoride varnish scheme, involving an inter-disciplinary approach to child health, should also form part of this programme – a move supported by dental therapists.

Drawing on current statistics on caries in children, Sir Paul said that 'all healthcare professionals, such as midwives, health visitors and pharmacists, should be given the opportunity and training to apply oral health education, including in relation to persuasion on fluoride.'

The MP said: 'We need to invest in a national oral health programme. It should particularly target areas with problems of poor oral health. This should be done in nurseries and schools, with the backing of local authorities, which would need a small amount of funding from the Minister's Department. As part of a health professional programme, use of oral fluoride for children should be promoted to parents and children until such time as the water supply in the area in which the children live is fluoridated.'

Dental therapists believe the legislative framework will need to change in order to support such a scheme.

Fiona Sandom said: 'Everyone, but particularly children, should have access to preventive dentistry. We need to use the skills of not just the dental team, but also all healthcare professionals to help give the correct messages, advice and preventive care. It calls for joined-up thinking and, what we call in Wales, "prudent healthcare", focusing on the best outcome for the patient, with them having an active role in designing services that meet their needs as well as taking more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.'

BADT's Amanda Gallie said: 'Because of legislation, we are unable to access children in schools and apply fluoride without a prescription from a dentist or a specialist in dental public health. We now need the legislative framework to carry out this "prudent healthcare" and prevent caries. It's what the NHS trains us to do.'

Currently, the BADT and the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT) are working together in a bid to address the status quo regarding the prescribing rights of dental hygienists and dental therapists.

## CHEWING SUGARFREE GUM COULD SAVE THE NHS MILLIONS

A new study published in the *British Dental Journal*<sup>1</sup> (BDJ) has revealed that up to £8.2 million of costs to the NHS could be saved – the equivalent to 364,000 dental check-ups – if 12-year-olds across the UK were to increase their chewing of sugarfree gum as part of a good oral health routine to help prevent tooth decay.

The research demonstrates that if all 12-year-olds across the UK were to chew one additional piece of sugarfree gum per day the NHS could save up to £2.8 million on dental treatments per year. This cost saving rises to a potential £3.3 million if two pieces of sugarfree gum were to be chewed per day by all 12-year-olds and to £8.2 million for three pieces. This research is the first of its kind in the UK and was conducted by the York Health Economics Consortium and Peninsula Dental School, Plymouth University, with support from The Wrigley Company Ltd.

There is a strong evidence base that demonstrates that sugarfree gum can help prevent tooth decay. Independent clinical research proves that chewing sugarfree gum for 20 minutes after eating or drinking helps neutralise the plaque acid attacks that can cause tooth decay and contributes to removing food remains. Increased flow of saliva also promotes the remineralisation of tooth enamel, thus reducing one risk factor for developing tooth decay.

1. Claxton L, Taylor M, Kay E. Oral health promotion: the economic benefits to the NHS of increased use of sugarfree gum in the UK. *Br Dent J* 2016; **220**: 121-127.

