EDITORIAL

Why it matters

By Martin Woodrow, acting Chief Executive, BDA

Last September's associate-themed issue of *BDJ in Practice* was really well received so I'm delighted that we've repeated the themed issue this year. One fundamental question raised by us having an associate 'special' though is why is it

necessary? When the vast majority of dentists are now associates, why isn't most of our writing focused towards them? Indeed, why isn't the BDA's work more often about associates and what is good for them?

Well I would argue that so much of what the BDA does is for and on behalf of associates, just as it is for practice owners or dentists working in employed roles. Much of what we do is for the collective benefit of all dentists, whether that is arguing for a more proportionate and cost-effective regulator, for more effective public health measures or for much-needed investment in dentistry.

There might be more obvious and direct benefit to a practice owner when we're able to successfully make the case for an above-inflation uplift in NHS contract values, as we have been able to this year. But the hope and expectation is that funding coming into dentistry is good news for all.

What the BDA cannot do is to step into the contractual relationship between one independent contractor (the practice owner) and another (the self-employed associate). We can provide advice and indeed, many associates do make good use of our invaluable contract-checking service. But ultimately, if associates are self-employed and independent, they need to argue their case and demonstrate their own worth to practice owners, corporate or otherwise. In an increasingly competitive environment where associates are in short supply, many are able to do so. Indeed, as Ian Simpson highlights in his piece, we are starting to see small signs of recovery in associate earnings.

One of the key factors in determining the outcome of any negotiation is doing the right preparation. For associates working in England and Wales, being aware of the Unit of Dental Activity (UDA) value of the practice where you're working or potentially working is one of the most important of all pieces of information. Many associates may not be aware that this is publicly available or where to find it. So this another area where we are planning to help by making UDA data easily available via the BDA website – look out for that coming soon.

Returning to self-employed status for associates, there have been rumours for some time that this is a concept under threat, with HMRC reviewing the dental sector. This matters. If we move to a situation where associates are employed, this would have an adverse impact on tax and national insurance rates (although potentially also offering some employment benefits to associates). The outcome of the review may well not go that far, but this is another area where the BDA can and will offer both collective and individual support to associates. Whatever the outcome of the HMRC review, there will be steps that associates can take to protect themselves and we will be there to advise you through the technicalities. Our discussions with

both practice owners and associates suggest that the profession thinks self-employment works for general practice. The BDA will continue to argue for that to be an option and we are confident that given the right contractual relationship, in word and deed, then there is no reason that self-employment cannot persist in dentistry.

These are a few of the areas where the BDA is there to support and advise associate dentists. But we are always striving to improve. We'll soon be asking you [or have just asked depending on date] to take part in a wide-ranging member survey and will be asking specifically what else we can do for associates. Please help us to help

you by completing the survey. Your views are important and shape our offering. Last time we carried out this big survey, members told us indemnity was a problem. We responded and now we're pleased to see associates and other dentists taking advantage of BDA indemnity.

Help us make the next step change in what the BDA offers, because together, we are stronger.

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Here has been
an advertisement.

SPRINGERNATURE