

# Moving out of the darkness

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**C**an you keep a secret? Apparently, there's been a pandemic. Who knew? Well let's be honest, there isn't anyone in the world, let alone dental professional in the UK, that hasn't been affected in one way or another.

Private and NHS. Principal and associate. Dental care professionals. Patients. Every single one of us has felt the chilling touch and aftershocks of COVID-19. Whether it be on a personal, financial, psychological or you name it level, everyone has felt the impact.

As chair of the GDPC Associate Working Group I was asked to write the editorial, and it is my pleasure and honour to welcome readers to this themed edition of *BDJ in Practice*. Dedicated to the 80% of the general dental practitioners who hold the title 'associate dentist', this is the third instalment of the associate-themed issue, and there's really only one place to start; COVID-19. How did we as associates cope throughout lockdown? How are we continuing to cope now? How we will continue to cope in the future? All questions posed, mooted and answers revealed in this issue.

The concept of coping is an interesting one. One definition of coping is to 'deal

successfully with a difficult situation'. Many of the contributions in the issue are personal, so it would be remiss of me not to see how successful I have been so far. Has it been a difficult situation? Oh yes. Have I dealt successfully with it so far? Yes, in most parts. How have I done that? I wish I could give you a magic spell to cast to make it all better, but I can't. I'm lucky as I have support in the various areas of my personal and working life that have the most impact on my 'coping' strategy. I have a supportive partner, but he too is a self-employed worker so there is limited financial help. I have a supportive family but that took a blow when my mum passed away recently. I have a supportive bank manager – well, at least a mortgage company who have let me have a six-month payment holiday. I'm particularly lucky to have a supportive principal who maintained her ethics and paid me what I was due. Unfortunately, this was not a situation pertinent to all my colleagues reading this journal, an issue I know the BDA is working hard to address.

As things move through the pandemic, how will I cope in the future? Honestly, I don't really know. Much of life at the moment – personally and for us all – seems to be in a holding pattern. Losing my mum has helped put things into perspective but perspective doesn't pay the bills. I wrote an article for this very publication in last year's associate-themed issue about the struggles associates have paying their bills because

our earnings haven't increased in real terms for a decade.<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 has made this exponentially worse. I'm an optimist at heart and every morning I wake up hoping it was all a bad dream but unfortunately that never happens. I, like many of you, rely on the hope that it can't last forever and more importantly that the powers that be see sense and fund dentistry as it deserves to be.

I wish I could leave you with a pearl of wisdom. I would absolutely suggest reading the articles in this edition – especially the comments of those of us in similar situations – as a problem shared is most definitely a problem halved.

I could quote the old adage 'keep calm and carry on' but you would rightly, and probably not so politely, tell me where to go. However there's one thing I personally would like to result from this truly awful time and that is that we use the opportunity to unite as a profession. All of us. Let's have each other's backs. On that note I will leave you a quote from Alex Elle and I genuinely hope we all take it to heart: 'When we learn how to work together versus against each other things might start getting better'.

See I told you I was the eternal optimist.

## Reference

1. Canavan S. To pay or not to pay, that is the question? *BDJ In Pract* 2019, **32**; 11.

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