LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Unconscious bias in action

Sir, Reading two adjacent features in the March 2021 issue of *BDJ in Practice*, 'Understanding unconscious bias' and 'Provision of oral health care for people with disabilities', I was reminded of an international conference which took place in the 1980s.

I was part of the UK team organising the international conference for the IADH (International Association for Dental care for people with a Handicap) which held a conference every two years in one of the 40/50 member countries.

The UK was the chosen host country for that year. Feedback from other countries

had told us London was expensive, so we held the conference in Edinburgh.

On the eve of the conference, which had people from over 40 different countries attending, I was surprised that the co-organisers asked me, a non-academic, to judge the poster competition to choose a winner. I identified various categories to assess the posters, relevant subject; scientifically correct; attractive display etc. I walked round the displayed posters scoring each category out of 10 for each of the posters and came up with a winner.

The winning poster was from Japan, and the Japanese were gobsmacked. They

had never won, and had never expected to win.

Afterwards, I learnt that over the previous years the poster competition had almost always been won by an entry from the host country ie an American won the poster competition when the conference was held in the USA, a French poster won at the conference in Nice, a Danish entry won at the Bergen conference.

Looking back I wonder if some of the chosen poster winners at IADH conferences were the result of unconscious bias?

R. Rippon, Henley on Thames

Independent review into diversity and inclusion welcomed

The British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (BAOMS) has welcomed the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSEng) independent review into diversity and inclusion, conducted by Dame Helena Kennedy QC.

BAOMS President Austen Smith said: 'Given the impact of the RCSEng holding themselves up to a strong light in their report *An independent review on diversity and inclusion for the Royal College of Surgeons of England: An exciting call for radical change*, it is clear that surgical disciplines in the UK owe it to present and future colleagues to squeeze out any unfairness or unacceptable labelling.

'As President of the British Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons I am proud of what has already been achieved within our surgical specialty.

'From the initiation of the Inclusion, Equity and Diversity policy by my predecessor Sat Parmar in 2019, BAOMS has actively pursued a policy of cultivating an atmosphere that recognises and acknowledges the differences between individuals, without judgement.

'This has already resulted in the most diverse membership of BAOMS Council, which steers and guides our association. Half of Council members, for example, are women and from a range of different backgrounds.

'We have a publicly exhibited gallery on our website that illustrates the wide variety of origins, backgrounds, cultures and standpoints from junior doctors up to senior figures in the specialty.

'In 2023 our President will be Miss Daljit Kaur Dhariwal, our second female President who is of British Asian/Indian origin. Her Presidency will be clear proof that it is possible to have a satisfying family life, and still achieve pre-eminence in the demanding world of clinical surgery and medical politics.

'Council member Kanwalraj Moar, Cleft Oral Maxillofacial Surgeon and Divisional Director for Women's and Children's

Services at Addenbrookes Hospital, has taken the BAOMS Diversity Lead portfolio. Her role is to monitor our diversity and inclusion activities, communicate our achievements and advise where we need to do better. In addition, she is a founding member and Honorary Secretary for the Society of Women in Maxillofacial Surgery (SWiMS), an independent Society that in healthy collaboration with BAOMS represents the interests and mutual opinions of female surgeons active in our specialty.

'Oral and maxillofacial surgery is rich with a diversity of skills, characteristics and attributes that creates a vitality and strength. I believe that the diversity of our members and leaders is an amazing positive benefit to OMFS. And I hope those who gravitate to OMFS will feel and be both supported and protected as they pursue their career aspirations.

'But, is BAOMS doing enough? Clearly, we cannot be complacent, and there are ingrained issues that will need to be aired and dealt with. The RCSEng report gives us a topic-by-topic menu for addressing unfair, biased or discriminatory issues. We must be positive and constructive in parallel, and continue to extend our present solid achievements to the credit of oral and maxillofacial surgery practice in the UK.'