



Draft day dentistry

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At the time of writing, the NFL's 2023 Draft is hours away from getting underway. By the time this goes to press, it will have finished, and 259 college athletes will have new lives and new jobs. It's a process where the best players from college football 'declare' they're going to enter the draft, go through scouting days, a Combine (which consists of a host of drills and measurements) and a 'Pro Day' where they can showcase some skills before draft night begins. The draft consists of seven rounds, and the worst team from the preceding season in the NFL gets to pick first in each round. Teams can trade places, but they often have to give up draft capital to move up. It's a system of meritocracy I love.

Imagine if that was UK dentistry. Students could decide in year three of their course they were competent and talented enough to declare for the next year's intake. Their DCT years would count as intensive scouting days, the Combine and their Pro Day, showing off their skills before being measured and

evaluated by scouts – in this case practice owners, principal dentists and corporate HR departments – so practices with the highest levels of clawback or in the highest areas of deprivation, for example, could pick the most talented dentist coming out of dental school and training to take in their practice. Each practice will of course have their individual needs – orthodontists, oral surgeons, dental hygienists – and will draft students accordingly.

It is, of course, absolutely ludicrous to suggest this would work, but I love the parallels. After all, those practices with the highest levels of clawback may be those who struggle to recruit. The practices in the highest areas of deprivation would likely be incredibly busy and understaffed. You could even look at areas with 'dental deserts' – imagine if an area of the country that has struggled to offer NHS dentistry for years gets to pick their choice of professional, offer them a contract and get straight to work. Wouldn't dentistry be in a better place? After that contract finishes they can either choose to extend it, go to 'free agency', whereby their services essentially go to the highest bidder, or they get traded. *'Good morning David. How're the cats? Oh, by the way. We've traded you and a 2026 pick to Cornwall for a 2024 first and second round pick. Goodbye and good luck.'* Madness.

Ludicrous and madness aside, there is a clear need for a radically different approach to recruitment in this profession. Increasingly dental deserts are becoming less isolated. They're going from pockets to full-on jeans, taking over the land. Soon, the news won't be of dental deserts not offering NHS dentistry, it will be of *'Oh my goodness, you're actually offering it? Gold dust! Here. Take my second child as a sacrifice and sign me up.'* We are simply not re-stocking the shelves as quickly as the products are leaving them, and that is a problem.

So here's a call to action for all reading this. What are *your* ideas to improving the recruitment problem we have in UK dentistry? Is my draft idea as ludicrous as it first appears? Because, and let's be honest, the system as it stands is not working. It is beyond broken. Anecdotally, I'm hearing of practices resorting to overpaying current staff simply to retain their services because the alternative is far worse. And yet, that means their finances are stretched for when they need to hire, leaving the door open for other practices to outbid them for the practitioner's services.

We want to hear from you. Bring your ideas to the table. Send them through to me at bdjinpractice@bda.org. ♦

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