

Sustainability: Within our grasp

Sir, I read with interest your editorial on sustainability,¹ however, it only touches on the fundamental issue.

Prevention of dental disease is a key principle. The eradication of most, if not all, dental disease and the huge carbon footprint associated with the treatment of caries, perio, and oral cancer, is within the grasp of the profession. This subject is the core of the FDI, to which the BDA contributes

much expertise and input. It's not just about paper cups and single use instruments but about the way we practise, not least in our approach to elective, mostly cosmetic treatment which we are increasingly promoting widely to eager 'customers'.

Perhaps we need to take a view on this as well as taking a hard look at ourselves, and, at the very least, bring in the importance of sustainability to the informed consent

we discuss with our patients. Ever seen or heard a debate on this aspect of sustainability?

The BDA and the profession should be using the sustainability argument at the highest level to argue for a more inclusive, prevention-based approach to dentistry and a new improved NHS contract. Yes, it's a challenge to make our arguments as we must always put patient safety foremost in the procedures we carry out and the infection control measures we employ, but this needs much more up-to-date research to ensure an effective balance is achieved.

The leadership for this is under your nose and is prominent at the FDI and ongoing. The resources are available to every NDA but the signposting to it leaves a lot to be desired.

It's less about plant-based lunches and more about generating an awareness of the fundamentals of the *raison d'être* for dentistry and how we achieve the eradication of dental NCDs.

M. Armstrong, Chair, BDA Health and Science Committee

Reference

1. Westgarth D. The sustainability of sustainability. *BDJ In Pract* 2023; **36**: 4.



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Green options omitted

Sir, I wanted to take the time to highlight what to me seems a glaring omission from the 'Assessing your pension options'¹ article that was featured in *BDJ In Practice* this month, an issue in which you lead with the editorial 'The sustainability of sustainability'.²

Having recently audited our carbon footprint through ZeroBees, I can say that for the last financial year our carbon footprint was 104 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, the metric used to capture the footprint from carbon and other greenhouse gases in one simple number). Of this 104 tCO₂e, 51.8 tonnes was attributed to our pensions, more specifically the vast majority of this was my (the principal dentist) pension with a well-known pensions provider for professionals. Startling, this

provider has lots of glossy brochures about their drive to become more sustainable, whilst simultaneously investing the majority of my money into companies in the fossil fuel industry.

The significance of this cannot be overstated. Nearly half of a busy three surgery dental practices' carbon footprint, was from one person's pension investment.

I'm 36 years old, I've not built up a big pension pot, yet the impact it's having on the planet is devastating. I'm in the process of moving my pension through an IFA that provide 'impact investing', that is they carefully select places to invest money in areas that have a positive impact on the planet. This may be a step too far for some people, and so I want to leave you with one guiding principle for anyone seeking

to invest their money, in a pension or otherwise. Make sure the investment fund is fossil fuel free.

It's clear that fossil fuel free doesn't necessarily mean good for the planet, we should aim to avoid investing in the resource extraction and industrial sectors. However, for the purposes of keeping things simple in the area of financial investments that most dentists, myself included, don't understand, let's keep our money invested in funds that are fossil fuel free.

K. Walker-Finch, via email.

References

1. McKeown J. Assessing your pension options. *BDJ In Pract* 2023; **36**: 38.
2. Westgarth D. The sustainability of sustainability. *BDJ In Pract* 2023; **36**: 4.