



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## MENTAL HEALTH IN DENTISTRY: A CONSIDERATION

Sir, for the majority of students, university is an enjoyable and enlightening experience. However, over several years there has been an increasing prevalence in mental illness amongst UK university students. The commonest conditions reported were depression and anxiety, with a significant inclination toward young women.

It is well known that the dental field is of a highly competitive nature, for students and qualified professionals alike. Possible causes of affected psychological wellbeing include greater study load, encountering difficult clinical scenarios, isolation/loneliness and stress. On top of that, it's said that many young dentists are facing initial signs of burnout and depression. The BDA acknowledges that up to half of dental students experience stress or psychological distress during their time at university.<sup>1</sup> With the stigma gradually being lifted on mental health, it's more essential than ever to discuss such topics.

### 'The key to maintaining good mental health is to address any issues'

Before we go further into mental health, let's consider disabilities. A disability is defined as: a mental or physical condition that impairs the person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.<sup>2</sup> It's important to consider that not all disabilities are visible; in fact, most mental illnesses are invisible – just because symptoms aren't physically there when looking at a person struggling does not mean they are not struggling internally.<sup>3</sup> There is a strong connection between mental and physical health – our thoughts affect our actions, and our actions affect our thoughts. Lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, smoking and presence/absence of chronic disease can affect psychological wellbeing in

one way or another. Anxiety and depression can affect anyone irrespective of their personality or socioeconomic background, and presents in many different ways – it is a common misconception that pessimistic people are prone to mental illnesses, although this is not necessarily the case. Additionally, not all sufferers appear emotionally down, and many are able to still carry out tasks to a high-functioning standard the same as other people.

The key to maintaining good mental health is to address any issues; the more time left for personal concerns to build-up, the greater effect it may have on the person. The impact of suppressing concerns can have more of an emotional burden on the individual. The journey to recovery can be very difficult, but acknowledging and expressing such concerns is the first step in progress. Ways to receive help include talking to family, friends, a GP, counselling and mindfulness. Creating a safe and open environment to discuss the subject amongst colleagues can be of long-term benefit in personal growth, learning and support. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.

*S Osunla, via email*

### References

1. British Dental Association. Dental students: confidential support if you are feeling under pressure. Online information available at <https://bda.org/news-centre/blog/Pages/Dental-students-free-support-if-you-are-feeling-under-pressure-.aspx> (Accessed July 2020).
2. General Medical Council. Who is a disabled person. Online information available at <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/welcome-and-valued/health-and-disability-in-medicine/who-is-a-disabled-person> (Accessed July 2020).
3. Talkspace. What is Invisible Illness? (+ How to Explain it to Others). Online information available at <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/what-is-invisible-illness-how-to-explain-it-to-others/> (Accessed July 2020).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41406-020-0161-7>

## ACCUSATIONS OF RACISM HAVE BEEN MADE WITHIN CARDIFF'S SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY

Students at Cardiff School of Dentistry have written to Cardiff University stating that black and ethnic minority students have been subjected to racist language.

The letter, addressed to the senior leadership team at Cardiff School of Dentistry, discussed complaints of 'racist behaviour and unconscious bias' from teaching staff, some students, and even patients.

'We are writing to urge you to take action against racist behaviour and unconscious bias that takes place within the dental hospital and Cardiff University environment,' said the authors.

The letter also reportedly highlights a wider issue of racism within the dentistry industry.

Authors are said to have included an article that indicates black patients are more likely to have teeth extracted rather than treated when compared with white patients.

The students have asked Cardiff School of Dentistry to release their own statement, condemning all racism at the dental hospital.

The letter also reportedly asks that the dental school addresses the issues raised in the letter and outline a plan of action moving forward.

In a statement made by a Cardiff University spokesperson, Cardiff School of Dentistry confirmed they had received a letter from its students and stated: 'The letter raises a number of extremely concerning issues and alleged incidents. As a University and a School of Dentistry we take allegations of racism extremely seriously. We have measures in place to ensure that allegations of this type can be investigated, and appropriate action taken.'

A message written to all dental students today disclosed that the School of Dentistry is "committed to a community based on dignity, courtesy and respect" and also remarked, "Racism has no place in our school".