

## New BDA President vows to tackle oral health inequalities

John Milne MBE has taken up office as the 136th President of the British Dental Association (BDA). This is the latest stage in his extensive history as a dental leader on a local, regional and national level, tackling oral health inequalities and gives him a national platform for his passion championing the profession. Taking over the role of president from the previous incumbent, Professor Liz Kay MBE, John Milne will draw from his long experience of representing the profession at all levels to ensure dentists' voices are heard. He believes that dentists have a unique role in improving their patients' lives, through preventing disease as well as treating it, making cosmetic improvements, and tackling oral health inequalities.

John qualified in 1980 from Leeds School of Dentistry and worked, until recently, as a general dental practitioner in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, with a special interest in orthodontics. John also worked as a clinical assistant (orthodontics) for the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust for 12 years (1999-2011), and as a dental practice adviser for Wakefield primary care trust for 15 years (1998-2013). For eight years, John was the senior national dental adviser to the Care Quality Commission, a role he held until March this year. In recognition of his services to dentistry, John was awarded

an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2015.

During his presidency, John plans to focus on the role the profession plays supporting some of the vulnerable patients in society. He believes that the profession is uniquely placed to promote the prevention of disease and to fight the consequences of that disease where it happens, particularly among the patients who need us most. He is acutely aware of one major moral and ethical issue for the dental profession – and politicians – the persistence of oral health inequalities across society, which he witnessed first-hand in his practice in Wakefield. In this regard, John is especially proud of the work he did at the CQC on Smiling Matters, raising awareness of the dental access crisis for care home residents. He has also volunteered for Bridge2Aid in Tanzania and now serves as a trustee.

John Milne said: 'As we emerge from COVID-19, oral health inequality is widening once again. Decades of progress risk being undone. COVID has changed the game. As with the rest of NHS dentistry, what little access we had has fallen off a cliff. Long-term problems have become existential threats. And hard-won health gains risk being lost.

'This is disheartening but I believe we can change things; we have to keep chipping away. It's often tempting to throw in the towel but it's right to call out governments when



they fail to listen to our patients and the profession.

'In my presidential year I'm not going to write a love letter to the NHS. But equally neither am I going to pen its obituary. I want my presidency to support meaningful progress for groups that need – but often don't get – the care they need from the NHS.

'To be elected as president feels like a joyful homecoming. It goes without saying I will do everything within my power to improve the lot of my colleagues, wherever they work. We are stronger when our whole dental community works together.'