

CALL FOR DENTAL PRACTICES TO FORM PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOLS TO ACHIEVE 'MASSIVE CHANGE'

A collaboration between a school and a dental practice in Cambridge instigated by dental nurse Jo Dawson is set to inspire the development of more partnerships around the UK to improve children's oral health. A website to enable school and dental practices to forge links is now launched.¹



Wail Girgis

Wail Girgis, Clinical Director at Devonshire House Dental Practice where Jo works, said what she was doing was very special. 'If you talk directly to the children and explain how harmful sugary snacks can be, they get it. If you reach them young enough, they absorb the message.'

The dental practice funds fruit and vegetables on the first day of term and the first day after half-term. This is to replace the raisins which would otherwise be given out by the School Fruit and Vegetable Service (SFVS).

Dr Girgis said: 'It's a very small amount of money to get an important message across. Jo takes the lead with this campaign – it's very empowering for dental nurses to take on a role like this. If more dental practices formed a partnership with their local primary school, it could lead to massive change.'

Carol Shaw, head teacher of the partner school, Pendragon Community Primary School, said the teaching staff and the Governors have supported the collaboration with the dental practice where Jo works. 'The concept of forging a relationship with a dental practice is inspired. At Pendragon Community Primary School, children and their parents are now more aware of the importance of healthy eating and regular tooth-brushing. It's a wonderful collaboration.'

Meanwhile, the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD) is calling for a pilot scheme to obtain a greater understanding of the challenges and benefits of a collaborative approach and how such partnerships might work in the interests of children's oral health.

Jo's progress has been followed by *BDJ Team*, starting with the Raisin Awareness Campaign² which was committed to removing raisins as snacks. This earned her a place as a runner up in BSPD's Outstanding Innovation Award. In 2021, she raised the bar and established a Community Interest Company, Awesome Oral Health.³

This year Jo has addressed several dental events⁴ including the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry conference. She is now working hard to promote the website which enables dental practices and schools to form partnerships.

Nigel Carter OBE, Chairman of the Oral Health Foundation, said: 'Jo has come up with a fantastic idea of encouraging dental practices to create formal links with the schools in their area. With oral health coming into the Key Stage 1⁵ and Key Stage 2⁶ curricula for the first time this academic year the time has never been better to raise the profile of oral health in schools and the importance of a healthy diet.'

Urshla (Oosh) Devalia, BSPD's Honorary Secretary, said: 'Innovative ideas to improve oral health, of which the Awesome Oral Health initiative is a great example, are often embedded in community collaboration. BSPD is passionate about supporting innovations of this kind and are delighted that Jo Dawson is driving forward her educational agenda. As a next step, we would like to see a pilot scheme in which dental practices partner



Jo Dawson



Oosh Devalia

with schools to obtain an understanding of the challenges and benefits of a collaborative approach and how such partnerships might work in the interests of children's oral health.'

Jacqui Elsdon, President of the British Association for Dental Nurses (BADN), said: 'At BADN we are enormously proud of Jo who has been a member for nearly 20 years. The success and meaningful progress that she has made in relation to her raisin awareness campaign has been truly inspiring. It is wonderful to read about the positive impact Jo has made on so many mini mouths to date. I know that she will continue with her campaign to improve "healthy snack" policies in schools with her never ending drive and determination.'

Fiona Ellwood, on behalf of the Society of British Dental Nurses, said: 'The Society supports all dental nurses taking forward public health initiatives that truly make a difference, not just to one child but to many. We are delighted to see Jo look at young children and only hope this becomes a life-course message. I know some of our team have looked at such incidences in the care homes where it matters too.'

References

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