



BSDHT sets new goals for National Smile Month 2024



In this insightful interview, **Miranda Steeples**¹ shares the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy's plans for National Smile Month 2024.

Could you please start by telling us about the initiatives the BSDHT will be implementing this year?

Miranda: This year, we're thrilled to bring back our 'First Smiles' initiative, which is

kindly being supported by Oral-B. This scheme focuses on educating children through engaging school visits, where play and games are used to introduce the basics of oral healthcare. It's a fantastic way to normalise daily oral care, delivered by dental hygienists and dental therapists.

Applications to take part are open until 31 May, and we're planning for the majority of our school visits to occur on Friday, 14 June, which coincides with the grand finale of National Smile Month.

Last year, 50 wonderful volunteers reached over 2,000 children. This year, as we celebrate our 75th anniversary, my hope is to expand our reach to 75 schools, making it our most ambitious and impactful initiative yet!

With such crucial messages to impart, how does BSDHT plan to communicate the key ideas of National Smile Month effectively?

Miranda: We are leveraging a variety of platforms to ensure our messages resonate

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'It's a win for the public and a win for us, so please join us in helping to create healthy smiles across the nation.'

with as wide an audience as possible. During the 'First Smiles' visits, we'll share the key messages directly with children. Additionally, we're maximising our use of social media, so expect engaging posts and insightful short videos. We're encouraging all our members to share these resources widely, which will help these important messages reach diverse audiences across their own networks as well.

Collaboration seems to be a key theme this year. Can you tell us more about any partnerships or collaborations planned?

Miranda: We're partnering with the Oral Health Foundation to host an 'Ask the Expert' panel session on Instagram. This will provide an accessible platform for the public to ask questions directly from the experts at BSDHT and the Oral Health Foundation. It's a dynamic way to raise awareness, engage with the community and offer direct, personalised advice.

While on the subject of raising oral health awareness, how important is National Smile Month in terms of the BSDHT's efforts in this area?

Miranda: It's incredibly important. National Smile Month has been a cornerstone in promoting sound, evidence-based advice on oral health. The campaign consistently delivers preventive messages that, if followed, can greatly enhance oral health. It's a pivotal time of year for us to reinforce the foundations of good oral care.

With ongoing inequalities in oral health, what strategies do you believe are most effective in reaching underserved communities?

Miranda: This is a critical issue. Our 'First Smiles' initiative is designed to reach children from all walks of life, including those all-important underserved communities. Additionally, '75 hours for 75 years' presents a unique opportunity for our members to

engage with their communities through various activities. They might want to offer free oral hygiene advice, participate in community events, volunteer on a Dentaaid van, or organise donations of toothbrushes and toothpaste to local food banks. Let your imagination guide you in how you can make a difference!

What are some of the biggest challenges you face during National Smile Month, and how do you plan to address them?

Miranda: One major challenge is extending our reach beyond our immediate followers. To address this, we encourage our members to share our social media content. This helps spread our message to a broader audience, including those who might not otherwise receive these important health messages.

Lastly, how does participating in National Smile Month benefit dental hygienists and dental therapists, both professionally and personally?

Miranda: Participating in National Smile Month is a powerful reminder of why we entered this profession – to educate and motivate people in maintaining their oral health. It reconnects us with our core purpose and inspires us to continue making a difference in the lives of our patients. For me personally, it's a fulfilling experience that reinforces our commitment to healthcare and community service.

Thanks to some really innovative initiatives and great partnerships, we're set to make this year's National Smile Month not just memorable but also really effective in boosting oral health awareness. It's a win for the public and a win for us, so please join us in helping to create healthy smiles across the nation.

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