I have had a long, happy and mostly healthy career. That is not to say that every day in the last forty years has been stress free. In fact, I can recall life-impacting tensity, occasionally for long periods of time, brought on by challenges both within and without my working environment. My resilience came from ensuring my non-clinical work always came second to doing what I loved: treating patients and feeling valued in the clinical setting. I had the support of a great team, a very proud family, a secure friendship circle and many great teachers and colleagues, some of whom went on to become my mentors. Not that they thought of themselves as that, they were just generous in their time and advice when I went for help. Some of them are here today and I thank them for making the journey to be part of this special occasion. I always enjoyed attending

BDA Branch events, which helped prevent isolation from my peers, a distinct risk in my career. I also have a life outside dentistry when I can stop thinking about it, at least for a little while.

I look with love at the next generation of my two nephews, Edward and David, as they carve their way in this world with all its pleasures and heartaches. While I understand why neither decided to go into our noble profession, I am trying ever so hard to forgive them. Neither of my parents have survived to see this day, but I know that they are here in spirit and in the legacy of life values they have left to our family.

I was deeply honoured and humbled when I was asked by the NI Branch if I would allow my name to go forward for consideration as President of the BDA and I thank you for your confidence in me. Ladies and Gentlemen, you

can trust me to uphold the standards of our Association and celebrate all those within the branches and sections who give their time and talents to support dentists and organise events around the UK. You can trust me to laud you and the brilliant work you do every day that is so valued by your patients. ■

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Valedictory address

Susie Sanderson
BDA President 2018/19

Previous Presidents warned me that the year would fly by and they were absolutely right. They also told me that it would be busy, very interesting and extremely enjoyable. They were entirely correct with that too. Although I would love to describe every moment of this last amazing year, today we are actually focusing on the beginning of Roz McMullan's presidency so I will restrict my comments to the highlights I have enjoyed and the opportunities I have been able to exploit for the BDA, its members and the profession. I will also add a few words about our relationships with the many other stakeholders with whom we work on behalf of our members and patients.

As I write towards the end of April 2019, we are still bemused by the frenzied inaction and paralysis of the known and unknown unknowns of our relationship with Europe and, by extension, with the rest of the world. It is, in any event, difficult to predict how the decisions of politicians, mindful of their own careers and interests, are going to affect the way dentistry is delivered in the UK and by whom. I do know, however, from my

travels, that the BDA is held in high regard internationally, so I hope that, whatever the outcome, we do not lose the very powerful synergies that are currently so mutually helpful from outside the UK. I am privileged to work extensively with colleagues in dental associations across the world and have very

'I hope that we do not lose the very powerful synergies that are currently so mutually helpful from outside the UK'

much enjoyed some very long (and shorter but more complicated) flights to take part in several of their annual conferences. I am still overwhelmed and so proud to have received an Honorary Membership of the Irish Dental Association. 'About a Galway conference and a perfect night (sic).'

Travelling as the President has provided some learning experiences. I do now know

how lost luggage is stored at Heathrow following its failure to arrive on the same flight with you. When mine remained in Hong Kong, a three day turn-around to the next trip requiring the same posh frock meant that I couldn't wait for the couriers to bring it to the house I seemed rarely to

inhabit at the time. So I had to go looking for it. According to the genuinely helpful and charming man at Terminal 5 in charge of the tons of as yet unclaimed suitcases, no one else does this. But then perhaps they do not have the schedule of a BDA President to honour. Closer to home, snow closed Belfast International airport immediately after I had talked with the Northern Ireland

foundation dentists and a most enjoyable party materialised in the business lounge as a result of the delays. And I know now that the train journey from London to Edinburgh, with its views of the Northeast coastline, is so much more fun than taking the plane. Most startling was the news, after bringing Heathrow Terminal 5 security to a complete standstill, that the Presidential travel 'gong', when x-rayed in my handbag, looks exactly like a hand grenade.

The welcome I have received in various parts of the world has, without exception, been warm, unfailingly courteous and generous and there is much to learn from our colleagues overseas. CPD sessions for American Dental Association (ADA) conference delegates start at the crack of dawn and finish mid-afternoon leaving the rest of the day for networking, family and social events. What an insightful approach to persuading dentists to take time off work to learn and reflect. It helps when the conference is at the seaside, of course. The ADA conference this year coincides with the FDI World Dental Federation (FDI) congress and parliament meetings in San Francisco. I will be there representing the BDA in my role as Speaker of the FDI's General Assembly along with others in the BDA's International Team and look forward to seeing any members who are also attending.

Closer to home, the evenings and weekends that I have spent with the BDA's branches and sections have been delightful. Unfailingly, the welcome has been gracious and warm. Recent and lovely memories are of the NW Branch's murder mystery evening and Middlesex and Herts expedition to Turin: wonderful examples of the power of the community of dentistry led by outstanding individuals. There are many remarkable members of every generation of our profession who volunteer to provide a local focus for BDA members to meet, learn and play together. During my visits, I have heard consistently that the General Data Protection Regulations have made their organisational roles differently challenging this year. I also know that the BDA's Events Team is providing superb support and organisational assistance for local organisers in respect of a phenomenal number of local meetings, conferences and study days. Change is always difficult, particularly where

tradition plays such a powerful and motivating role. Nevertheless, having witnessed the transition at first hand, I am confident that ultimately there will be an overall gain for our local networks.

I wish that I had been able to accept every invitation that was extended to me. I have discovered that the workload of the President is, as I was warned, extensive and I have also found that balancing this with a day job, albeit part-time, is a bit of a challenge. This is the chance to take a moment to thank all the BDA teams who have supported me so effectively with a special mention to the immediate Past President, Peter Dyer, the BDA's Managing Director, Peter Ward and PEC member Paul Blaylock for visiting dental schools around the UK when I was not able to do so. The purpose of the dental school visits is to assist with providing an overview of careers in dentistry but more

there ever a time when the BDA's role could be more important in ensuring that we are stronger together?

Before I hand over to my successor, there are a couple of things to flag up. The President has a unique opportunity to make a lot of noise about things that matter. During my year, the BDA held a summit on sugar, engaging willing experts from within and outwith dentistry who were genuinely pleased to contribute. I was delighted to co-chair the event and will be pleased to maintain an advocacy role in this critical agenda. Similarly, I am grateful to the BDA, Council of European Dentists and FDI for allowing me to be noisy about dentistry's role in antibiotic stewardship. In this, as in many other important issues, UK dentistry leads the way and I'm proud to be able to demonstrate this globally.

It is, I discovered very quickly, almost impossible to discharge the responsibilities of

'This is the chance to take a moment to thank all the BDA teams who have supported me so effectively'

importantly to explain about the BDA and describe the advantages of student membership. During the visits that I have made myself, I have tried to explain that the BDA is not something to which you simply pay a subscription. On the one hand, I really want those who are members to get full value from their membership and be aware of the wealth of resources available for them. On the other hand, I hope that I have encouraged our emergent colleagues to take the opportunity to get involved and influence their futures. If you are curious and enthusiastic enough to seek out the branches and sections or to put your name forward for our committees, we will welcome you with enthusiasm and a willingness to listen. Many Presidents have highlighted that the environment in which dentists work is challenging and subject to the whims and interferences of non-dental influences. In an era when even the GDC's own research finds that the overwhelming emotional response to its ever-present spectre in young dentists' professional lives is fear, I do think we are navigating the steepest of slippery slopes at the moment. Is

the President without expert support, logistical negotiation and sympathetic organisational nudging. The return of Alison Magee to this role meant I could sleep again at night – and be on the right flights and train journeys at the right time. As I type, she is gently asking me when I am going to have this speech finished. Thank you, Alison, for making sure that this year has been a joy. I know that without your experience, skill and, most critically, patience, I would have been a sad and inept embodiment of the grumpy old woman.

I'll finish by wishing Roz McMullan a most spectacular year – I know she is more than ready and prepared for it and will be an exceptional ambassador for the BDA. And in closing if I may, as the BDA continues to demonstrate its understanding of its members' needs, I will echo the words of John Craig, BDA President 2005–2006 who closed his own valedictory address by saying:

'May our Association and its members grow and prosper, and through them, may the Art, Science and Ethics of dentistry continue to flourish.' ■

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