

PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Stepping into the breach

Chris shares his story to help show how dental students, dentists and their families are helped by the BDA Benevolent Fund through times of hardship.

Before I got into difficulties, I proudly stated I was the kind of person who was never ill. You probably hear that all the time; however, for me, that was true. The odd cold and the occasional pulled muscle/joint pain (the joy of getting older!) was about my lot. I was 54 and had never been ill beyond that. How lucky I was.

Our children wanted for nothing and the mantra of 'I'll do it tomorrow' was always in the background.

Then, of course, one day everything altered, for the worst. I fell ill and not with something as relatively simple as a broken bone. I was diagnosed with encephalitis (an uncommon but serious condition in which the brain becomes inflamed), which also triggered epilepsy.

Unfortunately, I was working overseas at the time the encephalitis was developing and had been ill for a few months before anyone noticed there was something wrong with me. I have no memory whatsoever of that time and don't really remember anything until I had spent two weeks in the hospital over Christmas.

That's when the reality of my situation hit home. My family was facing mounting bills and had no income or savings. The neurology team had made it clear that I couldn't go into a clinical work environment for at least six months, and there was the possibility that I would never be able to work again. I did have an insurance policy; however, encephalitis wasn't listed as a critical illness so that wasn't going to help. It wasn't looking good.

My wife was distraught: she has cancer and doesn't work, and I had always been the provider and carer. Suddenly, we were faced with looking after each other with no income.

We initially relied on the help of friends and family, but that couldn't go on long term. We felt as if we had nowhere left to turn, and our situation couldn't have been worse.

It was then that a friend suggested the BDA Benevolent Fund might be able to help. When I said that I wasn't a member of the BDA

anymore, they said that it didn't matter and that, if they could help, they would.

So, with bated breath, I emailed the charity and then spoke to the General Manager, Laura. I can honestly say I was expecting to be told, 'Sorry, we can't help you.' However, when Laura talked through the process and put forward my request to the Committee, I felt as if a huge weight had been lifted.

The help that the BDA Benevolent Fund provided allowed me the time to sort out our finances and to recover sufficiently to go back to work.

I would wholeheartedly recommend the BDA Benevolent Fund to my fellow professionals and hope that they will continue to support this wonderful organisation. Without their support, I really don't think we would have survived. I can't thank them – and all those in the dental profession who help to raise funds – enough.

If you are able to make a donation, please visit <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charity-web/charity/finalCharityHomepage.action?charityId=1014657> or send cheques payable to 'BDA Benevolent Fund' to BDA Benevolent Fund, 64 Wimpole Street, London W1G 8YS.

They also appreciate not everyone is able to contribute financially and so they are suggesting other things people can do. General awareness is quite low and so they want to ensure everyone in the profession knows they are there for them in times of crisis. Sign up to their newsletter or follow them on social media so you can keep up to date with their activities and, importantly, have their details in case you or your friends and colleagues need them in the future.

If you, or someone you know, are in need, please contact the BDA Benevolent Fund straight away. If you're worried about your reputation (although there is obviously no shame in needing help), everything is confidential – simply call 020 7486 4994.

For more information, visit www.bdabenevolentfund.org.uk.

Do you know a DCP involved in research?

BDJ Team, the *BDJ* Portfolio's online magazine for the whole dental team, accepts original submissions from dental care professionals (DCPs) involved in research. Like the *BDJ*, *BDJ Team* operates its own manuscript submission site which can be found at <https://mts-bdjteam.nature.com/cgi-bin/main.plex>.

BDJ Team's profile has expanded rapidly in recent years, with a 280% increase in monthly page views between 2017 and 2019. It also boasts over 1,400 unique CPD users (through the BDA's CPD Hub).

Original papers by DCPs that have been published in *BDJ Team* include:

Sports drinks and their impact on dental health (<https://go.nature.com/2Yejwfk>)

Dental nurse to dentist - a battle against all odds? (<https://go.nature.com/2sLma19>)

Facilitating timely diagnosis of Sjögren's syndrome (<https://go.nature.com/381ufPk>).

If you know a dental professional interested in submitting an article relevant to the DCP audience to *BDJ Team*, visit <http://mts-bdjteam.nature.com/cgi-bin/main.plex>, or visit www.bdjteam.co.uk and select 'submit'.

All article types are welcome on the site. For more information and guidance please email the *BDJ Team* Editor Kate Quinlan on bdjteam@nature.com.

