COMMENT

Letters to the editor

Send your letters to the Editor, *British Dental Journal*, 64 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8YS. Email bdj@bda.org. Priority will be given to letters less than 500 words long. Authors must sign the letter, which may be edited for reasons of space.

BDJ covers

Sensitive illustrations

Sir, I congratulate Joanna Culley on her sensitive and artistic illustrations on the cover of the *BDJ* [Volume 228, from January 2020].

I've always believed in the blend of science and craft that makes for excellent dentistry.

Computer assisted diagrams which are now the norm invite thoughts of comic cartoons. They just cannot represent the beauty of nature like a hand drawing, and risk demoting teaching dental procedures to stages in a repair handbook.

We can't all be budding Leonardos but we can choose to learn in an artful manner.

H. S. Stean, London, UK

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No coronectomy

Sir, the cover image for the *BDJ* Volume 228 No. 1 [10 January 2020] is clearly the work of a medical artist working at the highest level. However, as a Specialist in Oral Surgery I would not have recommended a

coronectomy to this patient. The illustration clearly shows that the apices of the left mandibular third molar are well removed from the inferior alveolar nerve/canal. As such the risk of nerve damage is low and so a coronectomy is not indicated; indeed a coronectomy might well be contraindicated as it would expose the patient to the potential for further surgery should the residual roots become symptomatic at a later date.

J. Fraser, Cambridge, UK

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History of dentistry

Giovanni of Arcoli

Sir, Giovanni of Arcoli (1412–1484), often better known by his Latin name Johannes Arculanus, was one of the most eminent Italian surgeons of the fifteenth century. He taught at Bologna in the period 1412–1427, and then in Padua and Ferrara where he died.¹ His masterpiece *Practica medica seu expositio vel commentarii in nonum Rhazis ad regem Almansorem* (Venice, 1483) contained several chapters on diseases of the teeth. He described anatomy of teeth, although with many errors, such as the number of dental roots.^{2,3} According to Giovanni, oral hygiene played an important role in dental health. In detail, he recommended avoiding too hot or too cold foods and sweet and viscous foods (eg figs, honey and jams). He also maintained that the teeth should be cleaned at once, after every meal, from the residues of food left in them. For this reason, Giovanni suggested to brush teeth with thin pieces of soft wood (cypress, rosemary or juniper), not sharp-pointed or edged, so they did not injure the gums. After cleaning, it was essential to rinse the mouth with a mouthwash based on a vinous decoction of sage or cinnamon, juniper seeds, rosemary leaves and juniper root.^{1,2,3}

Giovanni appeared to favour conservative therapy in diseases of the teeth. In his opinion, a surgeon could remove a tooth only when any attempt to soothe the pain failed, when tooth disease could spread to neighbouring healthy teeth or when speaking and chewing were extremely difficult due to pain. However, his contributions to oral surgery were important. According to Vincenzo Guerini (1859–1955), Giovanni of Arcoli could be looked upon as the inventor of the 'dental pelican', the main instrument for tooth pulling until the end of the eighteenth century.^{2,3,4,5} Named after the bird beak, which it resembles, the pelican was placed in the mouth, with the hook on top of the tooth and the round part against the gum so that the tooth can be pulled out sideways. The pressure from the lever was intended to remove the tooth; the skill of the surgeon allowed the extraction in a rapid way.^{2,4,5,6} Finally, Giovanni also reported some problems related to tooth extraction. In particular, he stated that cauterisation with a red-hot iron could be the surest treatment to stop bleeding after extraction. In conclusion, the several contributions provided by Giovanni of Arcoli in diseases of the teeth make him worthy to be remembered in the history of dentistry.^{2,3,4,6}

P. Zampetti, Pavia, Italy; M. A. Riva, Milan, Italy

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