

Safeguarding

Protecting our patients

Sir, I am fortunate to be a part of Freedom Charity and engage with their initiatives to bring to an end female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage (FM). As healthcare professionals we hold the privileged position of being able to take effective steps to protect our patients, thereby saving them from becoming victims. We may well be the only available safeguard, recognising the signs from behaviour and things said by patients and taking swift action to alert relevant authorities. Sadly, these two practices still exist in the UK where approximately 130,000 women and girls are victims of FGM, the figure being much higher globally.

As my foundation dental (FD) scheme was based in a region where FGM and FM are prevalent, many other members of my scheme were keen to get involved to tackle this issue. We attended training sessions conducted by Freedom Charity and were shocked that in forced marriages 17%

involved young men and boys, 18% were of children aged 15 years and under and 7% take place entirely in the UK with cases in 2018 up 47% from 2017. Here, we were first introduced to two books – *Cut flowers* and *But it's not fair* which explore the topics in a novel, light-hearted, yet real and challenging way.

We each took the knowledge we gained back to our respective dental practices, sharing the stories we had learned as part of training and providing some practical steps on measures we can take to stop this from happening to a family member, friend, colleague or 'stranger'. We received extremely positive feedback from our dental teams. Some even shared personal stories of their own encounters with persons who had been through this tragic fate. To help raise funds for the charity and awareness of its work, we hosted a raffle at an annual FD conference.

For those interested, I would encourage you to check out the Freedom Charity website which provides excellent content, read the books noted above and wear

the Red Triangle 'End FGM' pin which supports the cause and leads to meaningful conversations about these issues.

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Dental education

Pressure and overload

Sir, we concur with the views expressed by Dr Mahmud in his letter *Mental health at dental school*¹ and we have previously commented on whether dental schools are doing enough in providing our 'just more junior colleagues' the strategies in ensuring mental wellbeing.² Indeed at the University of Portsmouth Dental Academy we provide ongoing support for the dental hygiene and dental therapy students in recognising and addressing their psychological well-being.^{3,4}

However, one trend that we have observed is the increasing pressure that our more recently qualified dental colleagues face in gaining a job to undertake dental foundation training (DFT) and if they aspire to, in dental core training (DCT).