

BDA and FGDP(UK) commit to tackling racism and discrimination

BDA

The British Dental Association (BDA) has set out its commitment to tackle racism and discrimination at all levels in dentistry, following international outcry initiated by the death of George Floyd in May.

In response the Association has set out a major programme of work. It will engage with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) dentists, as part of a research project to establish the views of those involved both in its ranks and the wider profession, to identify clearly those areas where racial disparities and racism exist within dentistry and on the basis of this develop an evidence-based action plan to address them.

Despite the demographic changes in the make-up of the dental profession, black people are still significantly underrepresented, accounting for only 1% of the General Dental Council (GDC) register. While other BAME groups are steadily increasing in number, all remain underrepresented at all levels within the profession's leadership.

The BDA is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its governance structures, with an emphasis on diversity and ensuring that it represents the profession fully at its heart. Lack of

diversity in leadership is an issue across healthcare, with research describing 'the snowy white peaks' at the top of the NHS.

There is also evidence to suggest that BAME patients are less likely to attend the dentist. The BDA has said the reasons for this need to be clearly understood, so that all communities can have access to dental services on an equal footing. Public Health England analysis of the disparities in COVID-19 outcomes related to ethnicity and other factors have drawn renewed attention to health inequalities and dentist leaders have said these inequalities must be addressed in oral health as well.

BDA Chair Mick Armstrong said: "The dental profession is guided by the principle of acting in the best interests of patients, regardless of their background. Yet it is clear, as recent events have highlighted, that we still have a long way to go before everyone in our society is treated equally, and with dignity and respect."

FGDP(UK)

The FGDP(UK) is proud of its long standing commitment to promoting equality and inclusion and says that it stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and is an anti-racist organisation.

The Faculty said that the diversity of its Board is central to its effective representation

of the general dental profession, however more needs to be done. It wants to be proactive in addressing these issues in its organisation and in the profession.

The Faculty is committed to addressing the impact of discrimination and said that it will be taking the following actions immediately:

1. 'We will educate ourselves about the issues that affect the various groups within the BAME community, and ensure our organisation actively promotes inclusion at every level. As part of this, we will review our ongoing equality and diversity training for FGDP(UK) Board members and educational programme leads to ensure that it is fit for purpose, and can implement positive and lasting change
2. We will invite dental healthcare representatives from Black, Asian, Chinese and other minority groups to join a task force, to be chaired by FGDP(UK) Vice Dean Onkar Dhanoya, to identify the areas in dentistry which directly or indirectly disadvantage these groups
3. We will collaborate with organisations and individuals across the profession to actively promote equality, diversity and inclusivity in general dental practice.'

FDS welcomes inclusion of oral health in early years curriculum

The Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) at the Royal College of Surgeons of England has welcomed the Government's commitment to include oral health education in its reforms to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework.

The FDS submitted evidence to the Department for Education earlier this year, calling for a requirement on promoting good oral health to be included as part of its Safeguarding and Welfare reforms.

Child tooth decay represents a major public health issue, with one in five children in England experiencing tooth decay at the age of five. This has a significant impact on young children's overall health and wellbeing due to increased difficulties

eating and sleeping because of oral pain and discomfort. This in turn leads to difficulty in concentrating and so affects their education. They can experience bullying as a result of the appearance of their teeth, as well as being at an increased risk of disease in their adult teeth. Tooth decay is also the leading cause of hospital admissions amongst five- to nine-year-olds by some distance – there were 25,702 such admissions in 2018–19.

In its evidence, the FDS also repeated its calls for supervised tooth brushing in schools as there is significant evidence, notably from Scotland and Wales, that such initiatives are effective in improving children's oral health. However, the Government state that individual settings and schools will be

able to determine how the requirement to promote good oral health is met. Last year's Prevention Green Paper announced that the Government will consult on extending the provision of supervised tooth brushing programmes in England.

Mr Matthew Garrett, Dean of the FDS said: 'While we would have liked to see supervised tooth brushing schemes mandated, this is a good first step in improving children's oral health. During the pandemic, dental services have rightly functioned differently. This has meant that routine check-ups – where dental problems are often first spotted – have been paused, making this commitment to oral health in education settings more important than ever.'