

EDITORIAL

And the award goes to...

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It would be good to write that there is an expectant hush from the bow-tied and glamorously dressed audience of diners as the envelope is opened. However, nowadays, no one pays much attention and the chatter and hubbub continues unabated as the presenter attempts to be heard over the disrespectful noise. I am not sure what happened to the state of collective manners or quite when, but a change had irrefutably taken place a long time before the pandemic. Since then, hundreds of thousands of helpings of smoked salmon, chicken with a fig jus and crème brûlée have gone uneaten irrespective of indifference to the evening's course of events.

The business of 'awards' will no doubt re-emerge soon enough, but I wonder if it is timely to sound a note of caution as to the conduct and value of some of the self-congratulatory back-patting schemes that have hitherto littered the dental world? There is nothing wrong with showing admiration for, and gratitude to, others marking solid service, acts of dedication or bravery. What is less certain is the nature of the processes that the gravy train of celebratory ceremonies engenders since many of the categories are open to the auto-congratulatory act of self-nomination. I was always taught that self-praise is no praise but, like sitting quietly listening to after dinner speakers and ceremonies, perhaps I am just plain old-fashioned.

It might be argued that there is no harm in such posturing. In all walks of life, we carve out niches of personal distinction which give us satisfaction, status and boost our egos. 'Best stamp collector in Altringham 2019'; 'Grower of the longest runner bean in the village summer fete'; 'Largest sweater knitted on bamboo needles with sustainable wool'; that sort of thing. What is different here though is that everyone is aware of the context of the competition, of the scale of the venture and the nature of the distinction. In essence, no one is in danger of being

fooled by the value of the accolade in the real world. One danger of the type of dental awards which are of concern is that while at least some people within the profession understand the way in which this can be claimed, to the general public and to patients, 'Best dentist 2021' has quite a different and possibly misleading meaning. When used for self-promotion with, let's be honest, the express motivation of raising oneself above one's peers (competition), the application of such apparent plaudits to CVs, practice literature and websites is calculated to extract advantage.



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In contradistinction, there are other award processes which provide a much more robust peer-review process in nominating and considering the merits of those for whom medals are to be hung, scrolls mounted and pins attached. The BDA Honours and Awards might be just such an example but few holders of the John Tomes Medal, for instance, are likely to gain any edge from the achievement, other than to alert like-minded individuals to the value of their professional contribution. It serves an entirely different purpose.

There is, however, the commercial side of the awards business to consider. Costs of purchasing a seat or, more likely, a whole table for a 'nominated' practice are high. Sure, it is a great night out for the team, an opportunity to get into the glad rags and paint the town; but are there less expensive and more inclusive options to consider? When sponsorship money is added into the equation

the returns are clearly high for the organisers, which possibly explains the plethora of opportunities. Not to mention the seemingly endless trail of hierarchical categories; recognised, significantly acknowledged, commended, highly commended, runner-up and so forth – everyone gets a prize to compensate for the meal ticket.

Narcissism is hardly the most serious of misdemeanours and I do not mean to be either a killjoy or to downgrade the importance of recognising high standards and valued service. I am not saying we shouldn't continue; I'm just saying that in a

litigious and increasingly angry world, we need to add context.

Dame Margaret Seward

It was a human inevitability that at some point, the sad passing of Dame Margaret Seward would need to be recorded in these pages and I am particularly sorry that it has fallen under my tenure to oversee this (Obituary on page 159). Margaret was an incredibly important person in the history of dentistry in general and of the *BDJ* in particular. Her decisions on the size, style, colour and direction of the journal served literally to shape the modern foundations on which it still rests, even as you hold this issue. She was a personal colleague, friend, inspiration, mentor and guide. I will be eternally grateful and I will also miss her dearly. Thank you, Margaret. ■

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