

# Presidential address

Professor Liz Kay  
BDA President 2021/22

**G**ood evening, everyone. Firstly, thank you so, so much for paying me, and the BDA, the honour of giving up your precious time to be with us this evening. And can I just tell you how very humbled and honoured, and delighted ... and absolutely terrified I am to be doing this, this evening, as your elected President. I find it unbelievable...me...sitting here...saying these things and being in this position. It's astonishing and I really DO have to keep pinching myself! I feel this because I follow in the footsteps of, firstly, our wonderful outgoing President, many of whose thoughts, views and passions I share. I think Russ has done the most wonderful, wonderful job as your President, and he has done this amid the direst of circumstances and amongst some of the most difficult, if not THE most difficult, years that dentistry has ever known. The complete lockdown on travel and holding gatherings during his Presidency has meant he has been unable to go about and meet you all in person...and yet despite all this, Russ has, throughout his Presidency, exhibited his usual calm, dignified and inspiring leadership. And that is one of the reasons I am so scared. How can I follow a class act like that? When I watched Russ's inaugural speech a year ago, I saw, and heard, a wise, gentle, level-headed person, who I could never emulate or live up to. I don't think the words wise, level-headed or gentle have ever been applied to me! Seriously, when I think of Russ and the individuals who have gone before him, I just cannot believe I am considered in the same breath as them.

I think, of course, and in particular, of the late, and absolutely great, wonderful Margaret Seward, who I loved and admired deeply, and who was counsel, support, mentor and encourager to me throughout my career. A truly fantastic person, who inspired so many in dentistry – particularly women – and who will be missed so much. And there are others of my predecessors, the indomitable and constant champion of dentistry, Susie Sanderson, for one...so many people to whom I owe much of my allegiance and love for the BDA and those in it. Please,

everyone here, thank you so, so much. Here, I must particularly thank dear Bridget Ashton and Malcolm Prideaux for their support, encouragement, mentorship and friendship. Thank you.

Now, I mentioned in passing the terrible couple of years we have all had, and I mean all...not just us in dentistry. Things that we never, ever thought would happen in our country, indeed in our world, have happened and are happening, and although I include climate change and the environment in the challenges we are facing, I am thinking now particularly of COVID-19, and I wanted to pay homage to the amazing resilience and bravery you have all shown. What dental teams have coped with, and continue to cope with, in the face of COVID is just incredible.



If these past couple of years have not proven that dentistry is an utterly professional, utterly dedicated, utterly compassionate group of people, I don't know what will.

And that leads me to what I wish to be my 'theme' during my time as President and what you will hear me saying, time after time...the gong I want to bang, the tune I want to march to, the parade I will NOT let anyone rain on....and that is...just how GREAT you are! I say that because I am enormously proud of being a dentist, and I am proud because I know that there is no other career, no other arena, no other area of professional practice, no other workplace which requires a set of skills so eclectic, so demanding and which requires such intellect and knowledge, combined with practical artistry. There simply is nothing else like it, and to be the President of an association which represents such people is just overwhelming.

Dentistry is about technical skill, but it is technical skill which works within tolerances of micrometres, not centimetres, and we utilise those skills while dealing with the emotions, neuroses, vanities and social mores which are connected to mouths, teeth and people. And, of course, while doing this physical work, we also need to be fantastically pleasant and caring to people, whilst also being a manager and having skills in business, HR, and planning, pharmacy and physiology. We also understand with incredible detail the anatomy of the oral structures and the genesis of the diseases affecting our patients. This extraordinary skill set is all applied in a tiny, dark, wet, slimy cave...called a mouth! How many other professions have people with skills as

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deep and difficult and as diverse as those in dentistry? None! Simply none! So that is what I wish my Presidency to be about. Celebration of what we do, recognition of what we are – a fantastically skilled profession, whose central tenet is others' wellbeing and adding quality to people's lives. WE are as good, as important as any other professional group and we have to stop being humble. I don't think we remind people of the service we give to the population, or how important we are to them often enough. We do not point out our immense professionalism, our resilience and our enormous skill set often enough. I think it is high time we did that, and that dentistry started to demand the admiration and respect it so fully and so rightly deserves, and I am going to lead the charge!

So, I will finish by saying that the BDA represents all the qualities I have talked about. Resilience under pressure,

professionalism and dedication to what matters. Belonging to the BDA gives one support, opportunities for friendship and mutual understanding. It offers guidance when things are rough, and as Peter Ward once said to me, the letters BDA run through my core like 'Blackpool' runs through a stick of rock. And the BDA can offer all the things it offers because of the wonderful and consummately professional staff. They are

our backbone and we owe them so much. If we were together tonight in reality, rather than virtually, I would ask you to offer the staff a round of applause. But I am sure you are joining me in applauding them in your hearts and minds.

So thank you. Thank you for electing me. But most of all thank you for being part of a profession of which we should all be SO proud. My rallying cry is to go and shout

about it. Dentistry must STOP hiding its very considerable light, which is so important to the public, under a bushel of modesty. We must tell people what we do, why we do it and why it matters. The public know us and they WILL support us if we stand up for the appreciation dentistry deserves.

Ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured to be your President. ■

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-021-3403-3>

# Valedictory speech

Russ Ladwa  
BDA President 2020/21

The last few months have been so challenging as we have learnt to live and work with the ever-changing parameters of the pandemic, in such an uncertain world. Normally, the BDA President would have travelled nationally and abroad, meeting members, officers and colleagues to fly the flag for the association, the profession and the United Kingdom. I was unable to do any of this. However, I am very philosophical that, like most of us, I have kept healthy and I am here. My thoughts go to all the families we know who have lost loved ones due directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 virus.

I sincerely wish my successor a much more normal term. I know that Professor Liz Kay will take the BDA to greater heights with all her knowledge, skills and experience. When others may be comfortable to remain quiet, I know she will speak up, especially for those that cannot speak for themselves.

My recent and respected predecessors have also set a very high bar for me to attain, all continuing to serve both the BDA and the profession at large, in various capacities, both at home and abroad. I hope I will have their energy and enthusiasm to be able to follow their grand examples.

The first and total lockdown last year was a good time for reflection for all of us in trying to sort what was really important and setting our priorities in life and work. The real test has been how much of that we have maintained and retained in these critical times.

On 8 June last year, at very short notice, my daughter and I together with so many other colleagues nationwide returned to our clinical duties, to provide as full and as comprehensive a service to our patients as possible, despite all the problems with PPE, fallow times etc... All the clinicians who returned to work and every one of their supporting teams were the unsung heroes of the dental profession, unbeaten by the pandemic. On behalf of the BDA, I would like to pay tribute to all of them.



**'I remain sincerely hopeful that we will find ways to cope with the pandemic and continue to serve our communities well for a long time to come, in a manner that we would always be proud of.'**

The BDA staff, well led by Martin Woodrow, also quickly adapted to remote working and spent long hours to solidly support members' services and answer their constant queries. My sincere and heartfelt congratulations and thanks on behalf of all the members and all officers of the BDA.

I was able to attend many of the online meetings of the PEC, astutely led by Eddie Crouch, and various other committees, and observe at close hand the dedication and zeal of all the elected officials at all levels in finding innovative solutions to often tricky and seemingly insurmountable problems.

My one regret is that I was unable to action my bridge building and communication skills with diplomacy and tact to work closer with the CDO. The General Dental Services are still mired by a dire contract, which the pandemic has sharply focused on, causing an all-time low morale in practitioners and their teams. At times, it seems as if nobody wants to listen, let alone understand. Quick fixes to make things look better will not work any longer and the system of NHS dentistry faces a

collapse unless politicians get a grasp of the real and core reasons why. I do not believe that there is a shortage of dentists, but there is certainly a shortage of dentists willing to work for the NHS. They simply need to ask WHY? To my mind, the state needs to make a real investment and commitment to NHS dentistry to make it work and have a significant and vital role in wider healthcare. It is often an afterthought and has become a 'Cinderella' of healthcare.

As strong as the BDA is, with its long and illustrious history, in this ever-changing world, we need strong allies to back us