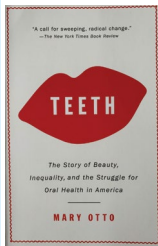


## BOOK REVIEW



### TEETH: THE STORY OF BEAUTY, INEQUALITY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ORAL HEALTH IN AMERICA

Mary Otto; 2017; The New Press; £17.65; pp. 28; ISBN: 978-1620971444

To categorise *Teeth* by Mary Otto would be to put it somewhere between investigative journalism, historical analysis and public health research. Otto wrote the book after investigating the story of Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old boy from Maryland who died as a result of an untreated dental infection.

It tells the story of American dentistry, from its inception to current practice, and outlines how far there is still to go. It is unsurprising to read that for some vulnerable people at the centre of America's cities, there is not a marked difference between where dentistry has been historically and where it is now, in terms of their ability to access affordable dental care.

Otto looks into the founding of the dental profession and why it was never fully integrated into medicine. Although there are great benefits, particularly in terms of specialised training from an early stage, the book made me reflect on the negative results of this – notably the separation of oral health from the

rest of the body in current UK education. This is particularly true of the lack of comprehensive oral health education for medical students and GP trainees; their training currently encourages them to see oral health as the domain of the dentist. Otto also acknowledges how this degree of separation keeps dentistry away from inclusion in important policy and legislation.

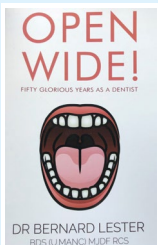
The author clearly outlines the social ramifications of dental disease in a way which illustrates dental health as a need, not a luxury. I was hoping that the exponential growth of cosmetic dentistry and our profession's involvement in the beauty industry would be subject to Otto's investigation and sharp analysis, but I found this to be lacking.

As a dentist in the UK, I hoped to read this book at an arm's length. But the more I read, the more comparisons with current UK dentistry I saw. In the last few years, there have been many reports of an inaccessibility to affordable dental care in some smaller cities and towns in the UK, resulting in patients, if they have the means to, travelling upwards of 100 miles for NHS care.

Overall, the book is an enjoyable read for anyone with an interest in medical history, but is an essential read for those who wish to reflect on the accessibility of affordable dental care in a westernised health system, and the consequences for those who go without.

Rachel Vernazza

## BOOK REVIEW



### OPEN WIDE! FIFTY GLORIOUS YEARS AS A DENTIST

Dr Bernard Lester; 2021; Pegasus Elliot Mackenzie Publishers; £7.99; pp. 136; ISBN: 9781800160231

This is an honest and enjoyable memoir about the trials and tribulations of a vocational dentist. It will act as an inspiration to many considering this profession, topical for those currently practising and perhaps nostalgic for those whose careers are now complete. It recounts the career and growth of a dentist into a prominent member of his community, with hilarious and touching anecdotes along the way.

The nostalgia of university days is emulated in chapter one with visions of cadaver dissecting rooms and fainting dental students, followed by de-briefing trips to the local curry house. The spirit of being a dental student is captured perfectly. Lester writes 'as we faced the challenges of our first year, we became a mutually supportive community and developed a camaraderie that lasted for many years after we qualified', reflective of the enduring relationships many dentists build in the early stages of their dental career.

We are able to observe Dr Lester's approach to dentistry, which is holistic and patient-centred; a dentist who gets to know his patients and does his absolute best for them. There is a recollection of providing a temporary filling for a patient in extreme pain while the two were coincidentally holidaying in Crete. And a touching note from the husband of a patient who was seriously assaulted, thanking Dr Lester for the invaluable care of his wife and for restoring her confidence in facing the world again, reflecting the genuine impact a dentist can have on the lives of their patients.

Beyond patient stories is a tribute to Dr Lester's dental team who have supported and worked with him throughout his career, likening them to a robust family unit. This team changed little over the years and one Christmas party was replaced with a team day trip to Florence to see the works of Michelangelo: the sort of employer everybody dreams of having!

In 1970, when Dr Lester first started working, NHS patient costs were a mere £1.50 one-off payment, and he experienced the transformation to the current UDA system. This change finally convinced Dr Lester to hang up his NHS scrubs after 40 years and move solely to private practice before joining a corporate for the final stage of his career.

This book is an enjoyable memoir of a dentist who takes pride in his profession, inspires loyalty in those around him, and has had a long and fulfilling career.

Emma Houlston