Toothless

Shaun Sellars continues his series on ethical dilemmas in dentistry which appears in every second issue of the *BDJ*.

I'm lucky enough to practise in beautiful Suffolk, famous for Anglo-Saxon hoards, Ed Sheeran and, more recently, an almost complete inability to access general dental care through the NHS. It's not that there aren't any dentists in the area; just that there are no practices able to see new patients under their NHS contract. Of course, the dental access problem isn't solely an East Anglian phenomenon, but one seen throughout the country, which appears to be more acute in rural areas.

Suffolk, however, does have a pressure group set up to lobby for better access. 'Toothless in Suffolk' started in response to reports of locals being unable to access dental care for years on end. In the six months of their existence, they've attracted the attention of local and national news networks and the BDA, but so far, there has been no sign of improved NHS provision in the area.

Understandably, the general public may be outraged at this, with the usual lambasting of 'greedy dentists' only wanting

to carry out work privately, but the reality is very different. We were sold the current contract on the idea that the swings would balance out the roundabouts, but if you're inundated with high-needs patients, you're facing more roundabouts than Milton Keynes.

Many mixed practices work their NHS contract at an effective loss, with private fee-per-item or plan patients subsidising their NHS care. Some argue that this is unfair, using fee-paying patients to support a fundamentally broken system, and dentists should move *en masse* into the private sector. But what happens to the patients who would be unable to afford treatment costs? Once again, the people who suffer the most are those with the least, increasing the inequalities we already see. In the long run, the lack of care will push patients into secondary care and community dental services, which are already stretched to the limit.

There is little high-level political will to change dentistry for the better. The recent governmental promise to throw money at resolving the COVID-related NHS backlog

made no mention of dentistry. Not that this is a problem that can be solved by purely fiscal means. Dentistry has been underfunded and misunderstood for decades by political regimes on every side of the House. Dentistry has historically set itself apart from the rest of healthcare, and for some time, that has suited us, but it's coming back to bite. Until we incorporate the mouth back into the body, dentistry (under the NHS) will continue to be pushed to one side to the detriment of those who need us most.

Back in Suffolk, the original 'Toothless' campaign has expanded countrywide and 'Toothless in England' wants to ensure NHS access to all. A worthy aim, but one that dentists have surprisingly little control over. To succeed, those at the top need to take dentistry seriously and those dentists who denigrate the NHS need to understand that their mantra of 'go private' is an impossible dream for many patients.

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Honours, awards, appointments

Mature Educators Award

Professor Igor Blum of King's College London and Dr James Field, Senior Clinical Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Prosthodontics at Cardiff University, have been awarded the ADEE 2021 Mature Educators Award by the ADEE Excellence in Dental Education Committee. The Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) Dental Educators Awards is an opportunity for international peer recognition of excellence in dental education. Recipients are among a select few the committee deems worthy of recognition for considerable contribution to dental and oral health professionals' education. ✧

Submissions invited for Outstanding Innovation Award

The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry's (BSPD's) Outstanding Innovation Award (OIA), which celebrates inspiring and innovative schemes to improve the oral health of children, enters its sixth year in 2022. Entries are invited from people who have established a scheme with a demonstrable impact on children's oral health. The BSPD's aim is to encourage, promote and disseminate good practice.

The prize for the winner is free attendance for a day of the BSPD conference and the opportunity to make a presentation. The winner of the Outstanding Innovation Award for 2021 was Simon Hearnshaw who entered on

behalf of the North Yorkshire and Humber Local Dental Network for their 'In practice prevention scheme'. This innovative scheme which targeted families in deprived areas demonstrated that with the right approach, flexible commissioning works.

Other previous winners of OIA are: 2020 Linzi Maybin for her Happy Teeth Outreach project; 2019 Helen Rogers for establishing CONNECT Trainees; 2018 Ben Underwood for Brush DJ, the music-based toothbrushing app; 2017 Ingrid Perry for Teeth Team.

The deadline for submission is 31 December 2021. For more information visit: <https://www.bspd.co.uk/Professionals/Awards-and-Prizes/The-Outstanding-Innovation-Award>. ✧