

EDITORIAL

Something always happens

Stephen Hancocks OBE
Editor-in-Chief

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A Happy New Year to all our readers and contributors. The end of a year conveniently provides writers, journalists and television producers with an opportunity to reflect on the events of the previous 12 months *in lieu* of having to dream up any genuinely new content. Legitimate if slightly lazy, but given absolution by the generally held belief that everyone deserves at least some time off over the festive season. Similarly, the start of a new year is customarily the time for predictions and for resolutions, allowing creators to either produce the necessary material before the extended holiday break, or slump a little during it. I should like to straddle both of these traditions, unapologetically repeating some of my thoughts in recent editorials while suggesting some actions for the time ahead.

I am often chided by family and friends for voicing an expression, a philosophy of sorts, that whatever the vagaries of human activity 'something always happens'. I have found that as an attitude to life, it seems to provide both a sense of security and an optimism about the future. On first consideration, I concede that it does sound rather a passive viewpoint. Taken at face value it seems to suggest a rather shrug-of-the-shoulders attitude, a *que sera sera* approach absolving one from taking any action. If everything is predetermined, why bother doing anything? However, that is not the nub of it, rather the opposite; it expresses a realism that there will not be a void. It suggests an openness to the possibility that whatever something does happen, it could, and might, or will be positive and exciting, presenting thought-provoking opportunities and possible future routes. Despite seeming like a negative attitude, it has given me a pragmatic way to navigate, if not to explain, life's tides and times.

The clincher in considering this stance is the effect it has on the relation we have to change. I know this is where I am at risk of

repeating myself but I do think this is crucially important for us as individuals and for us as a profession. Now more than for decades. The insipid speed of the infiltration of digital technology that I referred to in my previous editorial is a perfect example of this in our professional world.¹ It is manifest too in the wider world of society in which each of our livelihoods are made. Recent data revealed that over half of UK 'high street' bank branches have closed in the last seven years. Did anyone predict that in 2015? Probably not in precise numbers but with the wisdom of hindsight we can all nod and agree that the writing was on the wall as we, initially,



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reluctantly moved to ATMs, banking apps and contactless payments. Now it is accepted, normal and embraced. Who would, from choice, prefer to 'go back' to standing in line at a bank counter once a week to withdraw cash?

But something always happens. Bank premises have been repurposed to become residential accommodation very conveniently placed in town and city centres, other commercial enterprises such as offices, restaurants and even dental practices. And guess what, banks still make significant profits and all the employees who no longer sit counting out five-pound notes are working elsewhere. Our world is constantly reshaped without us taking everyday notice of it. Think of the rise of businesses such as AirBnB, Uber and home delivery of take-away food. A handful of years ago, we would have booked a holiday through a travel agent

(what are they doing now?) compared with going online and putting together our own choices, often involving staying in other people's homes. How did that happen?

What I am desperately attempting to convey is that dentistry, especially in the UK, is in danger of regarding these wider developments as if in the role of some erstwhile passive observer. Bad enough in itself but doubly dubious if the profession does not also apply these lessons to its own case. In now breaking my own vow not to use this editorial to make predictions, while I don't think that in 2030 (seven years' time) half of 'high street' dental practices will be

closed, I do think that they will look very different and, fundamentally, will be financed differently. Something will happen, because it always does, but the more awareness we have of the process and the more cognisance we have of our ability to shape it the greater our chance of survival. With that comes prospering for the benefit of ourselves and our teams and most importantly for the over-riding concern, the benefit of our patients.

At the start of the year, a host of unanswered questions crowd in as to the health of humanity, politics, economies and the environment, to list but a few. Be sure that something will happen. Be also sure too that we can influence it if we choose. ■

References

1. Hancocks S. Softly, softly. *Br Dent J* 2022; **233**: 979. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-023-5436-2>