

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# Dundee Dental Connect: collaborating with foodbanks to promote oral health equity

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Fig. 1 Students attending the Dundee and Angus Foodbank

Dundee Dental Connect is an initiative at the Dundee Dental Hospital and Research School<sup>1</sup> based on the principles of co-creation with staff and students as key stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> The remit of the group is to identify inequality, design and implement an intervention, review and raise awareness. Dundee Dental Connect collaborates with organisations who have robust connections with the community. These partnerships allow oral health interventions to be delivered in an appropriate and effective manner. The most recent project saw the Dundee Dental Hospital and Research school partnering with the Dundee and Angus Foodbank (Fig. 1). At this event, those attending the foodbank were offered oral health advice, oral health aids and the opportunity to access to dental care on the undergraduate clinics.

All staff and students involved in this first endeavour valued this experience

and the feedback from those attending the foodbank to collect parcels was also very positive. Student reflections following this were a testament to the insight such ventures can provide:

‘The setting was a cosy room equipped with comfortable seating where the people who had been referred to use the foodbank would wait for their food parcels to be made up by the staff. This was an ideal setting for us to start informal conversations with people; introducing ourselves as undergraduate dental students and explaining we were there to talk about oral health if they were interested.’

‘Over the course of the afternoon, we had many conversations about oral health, listened to people’s unique experiences and feelings, offered advice, and handed out the dental supplies – toothbrushes, toothpaste, denture fixative, interdental brushes, and information leaflets. In one of these conversations, we were able to discuss

the benefits of brushing teeth twice a day, and the importance of fluoride, with an individual who currently wasn’t brushing their teeth at all.’

‘We were able to explore their experiences with dental treatment in the past, including some negative experiences of dental infection and emergency treatment. It was difficult for us to hear how these experiences of acute pain and emergency treatment had contributed to dental anxiety.’

‘It was clear to see that a lot of people viewed dental care as something you only seek out when a problem becomes acute and causes pain or functional/aesthetic issues.’

‘Another common theme we noticed was people unregistered with a GDP. Despite a few people reporting they were being seen routinely, many described the struggle of trying to find an NHS practice taking on new patients. Fortunately, we were able to hand out registration forms which allowed people to sign up for a single course of treatment with the undergraduate students at Dundee Dental Hospital – this will help them with any current treatment needs but is not a long-term solution.’

‘Overall, we feel that this visit was a great success, however, it should only be the beginning of a prolonged and consistent effort. Offering services and building relationships with organisations like the foodbank is an excellent way to promote accessibility of oral care to potentially marginalised members of the community.’

‘Getting patients’ perspective on their dental experiences from outside of the hospital, in an unthreatening environment, is always very worthwhile – it encourages people to consider their oral health and seek appropriate healthcare services. It also allows us to gain a better understanding ▶▶

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« of the barriers to receiving oral care faced by people who we wouldn't have otherwise had the chance to hear from. This experience has put into perspective the reality of oral health inequality within disadvantaged groups and has highlighted the responsibility all dental practitioners have to tackle this.»

In light of the positive response there are plans being finalised to make these foodbank visits a regular occurrence. Dundee and Angus Foodbank, located at St John's Episcopal Church in Dundee, is run by volunteers and supported by 'The Trussell Trust'. Donations can be made to this organisation through their website.<sup>3</sup> This is a well-established Foodbank, supporting thousands of people and has seen a dramatic increase in use during the current cost-of-living crisis. Dundee and Angus Foodbank have expanded their purpose and now run sessions where people can access advice and services such as financial planning and debt management. This initiative was an example of collaboration and professional community development. ChildSmile<sup>4</sup> generously provided toothbrushes and toothpastes which were given to the families who attended. Without supplies

and collaborations, initiatives like this would not be possible.

This project has potential to positively impact the community. This has also demonstrated how co-creation can be a powerful tool for instilling skills in students, allowing them ownership of their training. Moving forward, there is scope for having general public partnership for co-designing future projects. Evaluation of the effectiveness of these projects both as training exercises and as public interventions is also an important aspect for consideration as this initiative continues to grow. Dundee Dental Connect promotes collaboration and encourages any other institutions who want to get involved to make contact. Ultimately, it is crucial that projects addressing oral health inequality grow and provide support and access to care to as many people as possible. ■

#### References

1. Munro K, Milner H, Seeballuck C. Connecting with local communities. *Br Dent J* 2023; **234**: 644–646.
2. Könings K D, Mordang S, Smeenk F, Stassen L, Ramani S. Learner involvement in the co-creation of teaching and learning: AMEE Guide No. 138. *Med Teach* 2021; **43**: 924–936.
3. Dundee and Angus foodbank. Available at: <https://dundeeandangus.foodbank.org.uk/> (accessed November 2023).
4. ChildSmile. Available at: <https://www.childsmile.nhs.scot/> (accessed November 2023).

## BDA AGMs

### Northern Counties Branch

The BDA Northern Counties Branch AGM will be held on Thursday 7 December 2023 between 18:30–21:30 at The Digital Lounge, Tyneside Cinema, 10 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 6QG.

Before the AGM, join John Milne MBE for a lecture on 'Wicked issues in dentistry'.

The event is open to BDA members only. For further information and to book please visit: <https://www.bda.org/events/branches-sections/Pages/northern-counties-branch-thursday-7-december-2023.aspx>.

### East Midland Branch

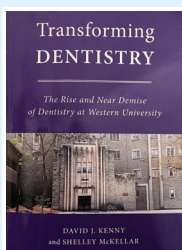
The BDA East Midland Branch AGM will be held virtually on Wednesday 17 January 2024 between 18:30–19:30 through Zoom.

It is open to BDA members only. For further information and to book please visit: <https://www.bda.org/events/Pages/east-midland-branch-wednesday-17-january-2024.aspx>.



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## BOOK REVIEW



### TRANSFORMING DENTISTRY: THE RISE AND NEAR DEMISE OF DENTISTRY AT WESTERN UNIVERSITY

David J. Kenny and Shelley McKellar;  
2022; University of Toronto Press; \$49.95 (hardback); pp. 392;  
ISBN: 978-1-487-52989-5

Dr David Kenny and Shelley McKellar have authored an illuminating narrative that provides insight into the first five decades of the dental school at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. This book uncovers the hurdles and achievements encountered by the dental programme, delving deep into the evolution of dental education, and recounting the numerous challenges and adventures faced by faculty members, students, and administrators, ultimately leading to a remarkable transformation.

The 330-page book is divided into seven chapters that document pivotal periods

in the dental school's initial 50-year history. It also includes three concise appendices, 40 pages of alumni photographs, and an extensive 80-page section of notes and references.

The authors have meticulously chronicled the growth of the dental programme within the university, highlighting the impact of various leadership appointments. This provides a comprehensive account of the innovative changes and significant milestones achieved. It stands as a testament to the collaborative efforts and visionary leadership demonstrated by deans and directors.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its exploration of the challenges posed by economic recessions, financial difficulties, political influences, and the strategic plan of a new university president. This plan necessitated the merger of medical and dental faculties, resulting in a revamped curriculum, organisational restructuring, and accreditation hurdles in the years that followed.

In summary, this book is a highly informative and captivating read. It offers an honest portrayal of the difficulties faced by the dental education system, intertwined with stories of resilience and ultimate victory. With its broad appeal to dental professionals, academics, and alumni, this book is a valuable addition to the history of dentistry in Canada and deserves recognition for its substantial contributions.

Bruce Pynn