

# Letters to the editor

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## Primary care dentistry

### Diabetes and perio screening

Sir, Doughty *et al.*<sup>1</sup> flag the importance of general health checks in dental patients susceptible to chronic inflammatory diseases in primary care and Yonel *et al.*, the importance of checking the glycaemic conditions (HbA1c) in periodontitis cases to increase the chances of Type 2 cases detection or an early pre-diabetic status in patients.<sup>2</sup>

Diabetes incidence is increasing, estimated to reach 12.2% of the world population in 2045.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, early prevention makes sense with a particular focus on periodontitis as a bidirectional inflammatory connection.<sup>4</sup> Early prevention is therefore mandatory at a young age. Figures in the UK in 2021–2022 have shown an increase of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes new cases (3,883 and 1,144, respectively) with around 96% being between 10–19 years of age.<sup>5</sup> Almost 12% are from the Northwest where deprivation impacts diet and access to NHS medical and dental check-ups and testing. The relevant role of Primary Care Centres would help in flagging special investigations in cases of unexpected poor periodontal conditions as potential signs of pre-diabetes or diabetes.

Our university is undertaking a pilot study on the periodontal assessment of teenagers as a potential early sign of diabetes. This will involve primary care support and public engagement in the Northwest area of Lancashire, Liverpool and Cumbria in testing this hypothesis and the current *Guidelines for Periodontal Assessment in Children and Teenagers* as a relevant and comprehensive diagnostic tool for the staging and grading of the disease.<sup>6</sup> Hopefully, the gathered data will be able to address a comprehensive and targeted public health preventative measure with future impact aiming to reduce the

number of cases and supporting the role of primary dental care as crucial for a holistic approach to health control in remote areas.

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## Forensic odontology

### Forensic identification by Chateaubriand?

Sir, on 4 May 1897, a terrible fire broke out in Paris at the Bazar de la Charité, causing numerous victims among the European female aristocracy who were holding a charity sale there. The extent of the injuries prevented the direct identification of many victims. Dentists were therefore summoned to see if they could recognise their patients among the bodies, by comparing the teeth of the corpses with the files of their clients. The experiment was a success: several cadavers were identified and returned to their families, including the Duchess of Alençon (Sissi's sister).<sup>1,2</sup> Forensic odontology was

then proposed as a new scientific branch, with Oscar Amoedo Y Valdes (1863–1945) subsequently setting up dental experts to intervene alongside forensic doctors when necessary.<sup>2</sup> This tragic news item is commonly considered to be the birth of forensic odontological identification. But it seems that this is a mistake.

Indeed, on 18 January 1815, some 82 years earlier, the exhumation of the remains of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette took place in the Madeleine cemetery, on the current location of the Expiation chapel (Paris), where their bodies had been deposited after their execution in 1793: Louis XVIII wanted them transferred to the Basilica of Saint Denis to be buried in the royal necropolis. The writer and diplomat François-René de Chateaubriand attended the exhumation, and formally identified the remains of Marie-Antoinette: 'Among the bones, I recognised the head of the queen by the smile that she had addressed to me at Versailles.'<sup>3</sup> It is notorious that Marie-Antoinette had to undergo, before her marriage to Louis XVI, several dental extractions, in order to correct a smile made unsightly by a somewhat anarchic dental implantation.<sup>4</sup> Laveran, dentist at the Austrian court, was elsewhere subsequently accused of having 'spoiled the queen's mouth, by pulling out too many teeth' – at which he took umbrage.<sup>5</sup> Marie Antoinette's smile, marked by this odontological liability, became recognisable among all, beginning with Chateaubriand who would indeed be the first expert in forensic odontology in the West.

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## Israel-Gaza conflict

### Call to dental colleagues

Sir, the UN has declared a humanitarian crisis in Gaza; we are deeply concerned about the loss of innocent lives, the catastrophic state of the health facilities and the continuing struggle of medical colleagues. Water, fuel and electricity supplies have been cut off – leaving surgeons with no option but to operate without anaesthesia, appropriate equipment or medication.<sup>1</sup>

A British plastic surgeon, Professor Abu Sittah (London), who is working at Al-Shifa hospital, has vowed to remain treating the wounded until there is a ceasefire, risking his life daily to help others.<sup>2</sup> Incubators are no longer functioning, leaving premature babies huddled together on the ground, supported with tinfoil to keep warm.<sup>3</sup>

On 17 October 2023, the Al-Ahli Arab hospital was bombed, killing patients in their beds and destroying operating rooms whilst in use. This is a clear contravention of international humanitarian law.<sup>4</sup> Article 19 of the Geneva Convention states all medical establishments shall be respected and protected by the Parties of the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

UNICEF, WHO and the UN population fund are urging for an immediate halt to attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza. Over 137 attacks on healthcare facilities have been recorded by WHO, leading to 521 deaths and 686 injuries, including the death of 16 healthcare workers.<sup>6</sup>

Newly graduated dentist Ahmed Al Hourani was killed, who had dreamt of setting up a dental treatment programme for the elderly.<sup>7</sup> Suleiman Tarazi was another dentist killed with his family, whilst seeking refuge in a church.<sup>8</sup>

The British Medical Association, Royal College of Midwives and Royal College of Nursing have all released statements to condemn attacks on healthcare workers and their patients.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Our profession has a moral duty to call for all parties involved in the conflict to abide by legal obligations under international humanitarian law. We urge our dental colleagues to join healthcare professionals worldwide, to support and protect hospitals, staff, patients, and civilians during this conflict.

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