

Dental news

The BDJ News section accepts items that include general news, latest research and diary events that interest our readers. Press releases or articles may be edited, and should include a colour photograph if possible.

Please direct your correspondence to the News Editor, Arveen Bajaj at the BDJ, The Macmillan Building, 4 Crinan Street, London N1 9XW or by email to a.bajaj@nature.com

SERVICES TO DENTISTRY RECOGNISED

Outstanding members of the dental community were honoured last month at the third annual BDA Honours and Awards Dinner in London, supported by the British Dental Trade Association (BDTA).

The evening featured presentations to individuals by the BDA in recognition of service to dentistry and the BDA, along with a range of awards presented by the BDTA and dental care professional associations.

These included the BDA Good Practice Scheme Practice of the Year, awarded to the Priors Dental Practice in Penkridge, Staffordshire, BDA Fellowships to Ralph Davies and Patrick Denning and BDA honorary membership to Sir James Carlisle.

Ralph Davis, recipient of the BDA Fellowship is retired from practice and currently works part-time as a primary

care adviser for the National Clinical Assessment Service. As well as lecturing he is a local level BDA Branch President, Founding Chair of the Trent Local Dental Committee (LDC) Liaison group and Chair of both Nottinghamshire and North Nottinghamshire LDCs. He said, 'I feel very honoured and humble to receive this award.'

The British Dental Practice Managers' Association Outstanding Achievement Award went to Bridget Crump, who commented, 'It was a privilege to receive my award among such well-respected achievers and contributors to the dental industry. I am delighted to continue working alongside both the BDA Executive and the BDPMA team to define and promote the contribution and training of dental practice managers against an ever-expanding business and clinical management remit.'

The other awards were: BDA life membership to Derek Debus, Adrian Flower, John Hobkirk and Gary Whittle; the BDA Certificate of Merit for outstanding contribution and services to the BDA to Barry Devonald and Rosemary Longhurst; entry on to the BDA Roll of Distinction to Mary Newing and Anwar Tappuni; the BDTA Award to mark outstanding contribution to the dental industry to John Davis; the 2008 British Association of Dental Nurses' Outstanding Contribution to Dental Nursing Award to Elena Graham; the Dental Laboratories Association Significant Achievement Award to David Smith; and the Dental Technologists Association Award in recognition of an outstanding contribution to dental technology to John Goodman and Dame Margaret Seward.

The event was attended by around 250 members of the dental community.



FINES FOR MISSED DENTAL APPOINTMENTS PROPOSED

The Welsh Assembly Government is considering allowing dentists to charge patients who do not turn up to appointments. Following its Dental Contract Review, the proposal to introduce a 'discretionary charge' for missed dental appointments was suggested by a task and finish group, claiming it would improve access to vital health services. The idea has been welcomed and could in future extend to other areas of the NHS such as hospital outpatient appointments.

Missed appointments cost the NHS millions of pounds per year, a fact that

has not gone unnoticed in Sheffield, where NHS dentists are taking part in a campaign to raise awareness of the problem. The campaign, 'Keep it or cancel it – just don't forget it' will involve displaying posters in surgeries, giving patients reminder stickers and using a chart to show the number of missed appointments and time wasted at practices each month.

In further news, The Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Health, Mrs Edwina Hart, has decided to delay the merger of NHS trusts and local health boards in Wales until October 2009.

RESEARCH GRANT AWARDED FOR NEW SMOKING TEST

A new test that can identify smokers has been awarded a Grant for Research and Development worth £20,000 by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). GFC Diagnostics has developed a test that detects cotinine, a breakdown product of nicotine, in saliva to identify smokers and monitor changes in their smoking habit. This micro grant will mean that the company will be able to develop a new type of cotinine test, based upon its patented SafeTube technology.

Smoking is the major preventable cause of oral cancer and diseases of the mouth, head and neck, but because smoking is now considered by many to be an anti-social activity, smokers often wish to deny smoking when

questioned by a doctor or dentist, especially if they feel their treatment may be denied because of their habit.

The leader of the research, Professor Iain Chapple, said, 'Among healthcare professionals, dental surgeons are often in contact with the population and are in an ideal position to provide counselling and advice on smoking cessation. Even basic measures aimed at smokers who are contemplating quitting have an important effect'.

Currently, most tests detect cotinine in urine which would be inappropriate for a dental surgery setting. There is also increasing interest from the insurance industry in using saliva because it can be collected in public, under the eyes of the examiner, so there is no possibility of switching or adulterating samples – a common problem when testing urine for illicit drugs.

In her statement to the Assembly on 11 November, she announced that the changes will be staged. The National Advisory Board will be in place by April 2009 to oversee the reforms and will be followed by the creation of the new local health bodies in shadow form in June 2009, prior to them becoming fully operational in October 2009. Mrs Hart has also announced that she is giving consideration to the creation of professional forums at each of the new organisations to ensure that the voice of practitioners is heard in the new system.

DENTISTS FACE PENALTY

NHS dentists are facing over a hundred million pounds worth of financial penalties for under delivering on their agreed General Dental Service Contracts following their first year of operation with local primary care trusts (PCTs). According to new research conducted under the Freedom of Information Act by the private dental plan administrator DPAS, many NHS dentists nationally are failing to meet their Units of Dental Activity (UDA) targets. It discovered that some five million UDAs have gone undelivered for the year 2007/08 and that the PCTs would be pursuing claw back where contracts had delivered more than a 4% shortfall, including several that had chosen not to do this last year.

HEALTH BILL WELCOMED

This year's Queen's Speech included 13 new Bills, along with a Constitutional Renewal Bill which will be introduced 'when time allows'. One of those included was the Health Bill which will establish a new constitution for the NHS and will set out the rights and responsibilities of patients and staff.

It also includes measures to protect children from tobacco, and legislation to restrict smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces which was welcomed as a victory for cancer and anti-smoking charities including Ash.



HELP FOR DENTISTS WITH ADDICTIONS



A new specialist health service has opened for London doctors and dentists with a mental or physical health concern or addiction. The Practitioner Health Programme (PHP) is a Department of Health-funded initiative and has been launched in response to the problems doctors and dentists can have

in accessing appropriate healthcare and the impact this can have on patient safety.

The service will be led by Dr Clare Gerada, a general practitioner with specialist mental health and addiction expertise and considerable experience of treating doctors. Dr Gerada

explained, 'There is a tendency for doctors and dentists to manage their own health concerns, to self medicate or to chat informally to colleagues rather than seek a consultation and treatment, and so health concerns sometimes go unreported or unrecognised.'

The team also includes a cognitive behavioural psychologist, a specialist addiction nurse and an occupational health physician, and there is access to a wide range of psychiatrists and other specialist support. In addition, the service will offer continuity of care when required. This will include specialist assessment and treatment for mental health and addiction cases.

Judith Husband, Vice Chair of the British Dental Association, said: 'It takes courage for healthcare workers suffering from an illness or an addiction to acknowledge that they have a problem in the first place, so taking the next step in accessing appropriate treatment can present real difficulties.' The service will initially run for two years as part of the work of building a national framework to support the health of clinical staff. For further information visit www.php.nhs.uk.

PAPER GIVES INSIGHT INTO QAT CHEWING

A new paper exploring the plant qat and its effects on oral health is to be published in the next issue of the *British Dental Journal*. The paper, *Qat and its health effects* by Dr Yasin El-Wajeh and Professor Martin Thornhill, explores the Southern Arabian and Eastern African socio-cultural habit of qat chewing.

The practice consists of placing the green leaves of the qat plant into the mucobuccal fold and chewing it for several hours, with subsequent release of psychoactive agents. Qat chewing is often accompanied by smoking tobacco, and it is reported to be associated with periodontitis, leukoplakia and oral cancer.

Dr Yasin El-Wajeh became interested in the subject because he grew up in a Yemeni community where qat was chewed on a regular basis. He found that major cities such as Sheffield, Liverpool, Cardiff and Birmingham had large ethnic minorities stemming from Yemen

and the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti) and where qat was still chewed on a frequent basis.

He said, 'On many occasions I hear chewers comment on the benefits and effects of qat but having looked at the literature I found very little in terms of an educational paper for UK healthcare professionals and more specifically dentists. Most, if not all papers of substance on qat have been conducted outside the UK, but gathering information about this subject was made easy through having first-hand knowledge about the plant, and having close contact with "qat circles" where friends chew qat on a weekly basis.'

Dr El-Wajeh explained that the fact that qat is a socio-cultural habit was not an obstacle for information gathering and there had been multi-centred surveys and questionnaires conducted in these cities looking at qat usage. 'There's

still more research to be done on several fronts regarding qat, as mentioned in the paper,' Dr El-Wajeh said. 'I would like to conduct a more scientific, lab-based study on the effects of qat on the oral mucosa sometime in the future, as my main concern is to determine whether qat should be considered as a cause of precancerous lesions.'



DoH DEFEATED IN CROUCH CASE

As this issue of the BDJ went to press, a Court of Appeal judgement on 10 December 2008 rejected the Government's attempts to interpret a clause in a Personal Dental Services (PDS) contract, accepting arguments put forward by the BDA's representation. The clause in question would have given primary care trusts (PCTs) the right to terminate a dentist's PDS agreement on minimal notice and without the dentist breaching the terms of their contract.

The Department of Health had argued that the clause was designed to permit PCTs to cancel contracts in areas where they no longer wanted services so that they could spend the money elsewhere, or where the contractor failed to demonstrate continuous improvement. BDA lawyers vigorously refuted this interpretation on behalf of the whole profession saying that it was patently unfair, not in keeping with the wider interpretation of the PDS regulations, and conflicted with existing performance provisions.

Rejecting the Government's appeal, the judgement describes the idea that it was intended PCTs be given the right to terminate agreements in such a way as 'unlikely'. It also argues that, if that was the intention, express powers allowing this would have been included in the regulations.

The Department of Health now has one month to lodge an appeal that would pave the way for the case to be taken to the House of Lords, the only remaining higher authority.

Commenting on the ruling, BDA Chief Executive Peter Ward said 'This case which was first brought by Dr Crouch had potentially far-reaching and devastating consequences for the profession. The Court of Appeal's judgement recognises the arguments put forward by the BDA on behalf of dentists. It also makes plain that the Department of Health's arguments are considered unreasonable. It is time for the Department to accept that and send a clear signal of support to dentists by acknowledging and accepting the ruling.'

BIRMINGHAM CELEBRATES LONG HISTORY

Birmingham Dental Hospital celebrated its 150th anniversary recently and marked the event with a lecture programme and evening banquet.

The Alex MacGregor lecture theatre was host to five speakers talking on a variety of topics, including England's Chief Dental Officer Barry Cockcroft, who talked on the subject of 'Matching Education, System Reform and Changing Needs' as well as some insights into his own undergraduate days at Birmingham.

The final lecture was entitled 'BDS (Benefits of Discovery Science). Found in Translation?' given by Professor H. Sewell, Professor of Immunology, and

Former Pro-Vice Chancellor of Nottingham University. He highlighted the importance of research in dentistry and the discoveries that have come about by the investment of funds in medical research.

The organisers believe that founding father Samuel Adams Parker would have been proud of the achievements of the hospital 150 years on from its inception. Professor Lumley, Head of the School of Dentistry said, 'Birmingham Dental Hospital has been providing high quality service to the West Midlands for 150 years and looks forward to continuing to do so in the future.'



Professor Lumley, Mr Barry Cockcroft and Mr Rick Roberts

GDC LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Dental professionals can now pay their GDC annual retention fee, update their contact details and check the details on their practising certificate before it is printed, using the GDC's new self-service website e-GDC at www.gdc-arf.com.

The recently launched site is aimed at simplifying the management of registration, allowing registrants to access their details at any time of day

or night. According to Edward Banatyne, GDC Director of Operations, a range of additional online services is planned for next year, including online annual CPD declarations and a paperless direct debit to pay your annual retention fee.

Any feedback on e-GDC is welcomed and should be sent to Processing Manager Anne Gerulat at agerulat@gdc-uk.org.