

CPD – changing access and raising standards

Stephen Hancocks OBE
Editor-in-chief

Send your comments to the
Editor-in-chief,
British Dental Journal,
64 Wimpole Street,
London,
W1G 8YS
Email bdj@bda.org

EDITORIAL

Two important changes are happening to the *BDJ* continuing professional development (CPD) programme, offered in partnership with UCL Eastman CPD, starting with the next issue of the journal (8 June 2013) to which I would like to draw your attention in advance.

In concert with the changes to BDA membership, the online answering of the CPD questions will move to the address <http://cpd.bda.org> which will be the new CPD hub for all BDA members. All of the new membership packages, Essential, Extra and Expert include this feature and all CPD taken through the *BDJ* and *bdanews* is free to all members. Full details of how to access the service will be given on the CPD pages in each issue of the journal with the new arrangements being detailed in the next issue.

The second main change is that from the same issue of the journal it will be necessary for users to answer at least 50% of the questions correctly before they can claim their CPD certificate. This will also be the case for *bdanews* CPD, but users will be informed of the incorrect answers and given the opportunity to review their responses and re-enter a different answer in order to achieve at least the 50% result.

WHY 50% CORRECT?

CPD has become a hotly debated subject in recent times in the *BDJ* as well as in other publications and fora. One of the concerns expressed about the CPD provided through journals is that it has the capacity to be merely a 'box ticking exercise'. Various users have sought to emphasise the point by doing just this and 'cleverly' illustrating the loop holes for those unethical enough to follow suit. In reality, the overwhelming majority of users get the overwhelming majority of questions correct. But this has not inhibited the detractors. As in so many walks of life the honest majority has to guard against the dishonest marginal minority.

One of the ways in which it has been suggested that this system may be made more robust is to introduce a 'pass mark' in order to deter random box ticking. This may or may not deter colleagues dishonest enough to cheat the system, themselves and their patients but it does at least provide a measure that is seen to exist. Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. Whether having such a pass mark means that we learn any more than we would have done without one is another whole, huge debate. This touches on the value of any type of education and extends to question whether or not it is possible to effectively measure motivations, actions and standards

subsequent to and resulting from such education rather than merely the outcome of exercises.

Be this as it may, as the leading dental publication in the UK and with a continually increasing international reputation, we thought it our responsibility to test readers' and users' opinions about these matters. In this we were aided by our partners, UCL Eastman CPD, who undertook a survey last year the details and results of which are published in this issue on pages 519–523.

As you will read, the results of the survey were illuminating especially in relation to the matter of achieving a certain number of correct answers, with over two thirds agreeing that this was acceptable at the 75% level. In deference to the reaction of some of the other one third who thought this was too high a level, we have chosen to institute a 50% level but this can be adjusted if deemed appropriate as the new model develops.

The survey results were useful in other ways too in terms of helping us to consider further developments. Since most respondents thought that questions making use of clinical photographs and or radiographs as examples of additional learning tools would be helpful, this is a feature that we need to consider introducing. The desire for more 'core' CPD subjects and hours is entirely understandable but the content of the *BDJ* is predominantly derived from unsolicited (but peer reviewed) submissions, very few of which are in the areas of the core subjects. To positively discriminate towards papers on core subjects on the primary basis of their CPD value would be in danger of distorting the journal's breadth of content and change its character. Fulfilment of these core subject areas is aided by BDA seminars, the conference and exhibition as well as Branch and Section meetings.

Our aim in introducing these changes is on the one hand to provide an improved, enhanced and more efficient service to BDA Members as readers and users of our CPD programmes. On the other hand it is to attempt to further the debate, throw down the gauntlet to other CPD providers and raise standards of conduct in the provision of continuing education. Someone once said that being ethical means doing the right thing even when we know that no one is watching us. We hope that the developments that we will be introducing will be regarded as supporting that ethical approach while simultaneously making more difficult any attempts at being unethical and by turn being unprofessional.

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