

ALL TOGETHER NOW...

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The BDJ Upfront section includes editorials, letters, news, book reviews and interviews.

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Christmas is unquestionably a time for that 'all together now' spirit, the imminent danger of enforced jollity in the form of the practice festive 'do' or the departmental seasonal bash. Oh no! But it is also a time for reflection and taking stock and of realising that a lot has happened since you last stood under the mistletoe.

Incredibly, fifty years ago this month I made my child professional acting debut at the Watford Palace Theatre as a carol singer in A Christmas Carol adapted from the Dickens' book which to this day remains my favourite. The cue for the house lights to come down was the playing of the carol *God rest ye merry gentlemen* and still a frisson of excitement runs through me as I recall standing nervous but excited in the darkened wings.

God rest ye merry gentlemen then as now conjures up images of jolly potbellied men smoking pipes, roasting chestnuts and toasting the season. Entirely non-politically correct, probably as unlikely and inappropriate in Victorian Britain as it would be today and yet strangely comforting. But if not much has changed for those merry gentlemen in the intervening years an enormous amount has changed in dentistry. And if that seems like the worst segway you have ever read then consider for a minute the image that you had of dentistry and that you now have of dentistry, because it has been changing fundamentally right beneath our feet.

The 'all together now' spirit has been very apparent in recent times. The BDA's continued battle with the General Dental Council (GDC), indeed the continued battle of many

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of us with the regulator has helped galvanise the profession and made us ask fundamental questions about the value of a regulatory body which has lost the confidence of the profession it apparently protects the public from. This in complete contrast to the continued, and if anything increased, trust and respect in which our patients hold us. What has been striking to me as I have talked to colleagues all over the country throughout the year is the determination not to be cowed by this threat to our relationship with our patients, modifying our approach to practice perhaps but not altering our inherent vocation to serve and care.

But if one set of challenges to the profession has come from within, as it were, many more bombard us from outside. The world itself is changing significantly, the rise of social media as a factor that can no longer be brushed away as a passing trend, patients' use of the Internet for seeking information and comparing quality and prices, the shifting financial circumstances that make business decisions both more critical and more difficult. All of these factors alter our outlook on the world.

Disease trends too are beginning to exert greater effects in terms of postcode pockets of deprivation and of overall decline of caries while the increased interest in the relationship between oral health and general health leads us into other realms and creates other potential partnerships with allied health professionals. These themes have been

reflected in our two main lectures this year the Anniversary Lecture by Professor Jimmy Steele who reflected on the question 'what is a dentist for?' and the Winter Lecture by Professor Philip Preshaw on the inflammatory relationship between periodontal disease and diabetes. (Both of these excellent presentations are available free with CPD to BDA members on the BDA website.) In terms of our age old adversary, sugar, this year has seen the coming together of new and strong allies in the call for taxes on fizzy drinks and a generally more militant approach to curbing consumption, albeit more in relation to diabetes and obesity than to caries.

This year has also seen the launch of our newest addition to the BDJ Portfolio the open access journal *BDJ Open*. We opened for submissions in March and were able to publish our first peer reviewed content in October with a number of other papers already in the pipeline and a verified following in over 100 countries. This is a very exciting new venture and one that I truly believe will bring great kudos to us in the coming years.

But to return to my main theme, that of a collective consciousness, I do feel that there is a growing realisation of the value of us sticking together. Whether to fight common adversaries or to learn, adapt, grow and appreciate the finer points of the profession from which the overwhelming majority of us still derive great satisfaction even if that frequently seems to be against all the odds. I am not at all sure what the modern equivalent might be of 'ye merry gentlemen' (maybe someone will tweet a suggestion or two?) but at least with the appreciation of the spirit which is their heritage to us 'all together now' Merry Christmas!

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