EDITORIAL

It could be you

Stephen Hancocks OBE

Editor-in-Chief

The BDJ Upfront section includes editorials, letters, news, book reviews and interviews. Please direct your correspondence to the News Editor, Kate Quinlan at BDJNews@nature.com. Press releases or articles may be edited, and should include a colour photograph if possible.

We all think, and hope, that bad things do not happen to us. It is human nature to wish that misfortune falls elsewhere. Sadly it doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes we ourselves, sometimes family, friends and colleagues have the most disquieting life circumstances that require help and support.

The BDA Benevolent Fund (which is open to support all dentists not only BDA members, and their families) provides that help and support to dozens of our colleagues (111 in the last year alone) who for one reason or another, outside their control, find themselves in straightened and difficult times. Few of us can have failed to have heard of the 'Ben Fund' as hard working supporters are often at BDA Branch and Section meetings as well as other occasions organising collections, raffles, auctions and various income generating ideas to help add to the Fund's resources. There may well be a tendency to balk at the suggestion of contributing as 'oh no, not again' but the work of the Fund needs to go on regardless of familiarity and beyond the risk of annoyance of asking for finances. Why do I write about this now though? Christmas, and the run up to it can be a particularly difficult time for those receiving help from the Fund.

Regular readers will know that I am a huge fan of the work of Charles Dickens and especially of the novel *A Christmas Carol*. In the first chapter two charitable gentlemen enter Ebenezer Scrooge's office seeking contributions. 'At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge,' says one of the gentlemen, taking up a pen, 'it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time...[and] are in want of common comforts, sir.' In abrupt dismissal Scrooge asks whether or not there are still prisons, workhouses, treadmills and the Poor Law, citing these as the sources of any comfort that

might be needed. To which the gentleman riposte (without success) that 'they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body' and that 'few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices.' And that is the nub of my purpose in also bringing the Fund to your attention just now.

A past patron and continuing supporter of the Fund Professor Nairn Wilson recently asked if we in dentistry don't give, who is going to? Can you honestly envisage garnering much cash standing in the High Street with a bucket marked 'dentists charity, please give generously'? and yet there are those among us who are in need of such help. That help is very

'We might all know someone who now, or at some future time might need support...'

well administered and carefully dispensed so that none is wasted, and often from those who have been helped back to health and work the money has been 'returned' with interest. As an example of the 'difference' made by the Fund, last December a dentist's family received £210 to help support it over the Christmas period and £340 was provided to keep an elderly couple warm over the winter.

The Fund works on the basis of attempting to first provide security for a beneficiary by making a home safer, as simple an act as adding new locks perhaps, and then ensuring that it is warm and dry. Next, food is paramount beyond which other help and support is provided as appropriate. This may conjure all sorts of images in your mind perhaps of elderly or

infirm colleagues, so it may be a surprise to learn that young people are also affected. One dental student whose parents had withdrawn all care from him was detected to be sleeping in the university library, showering in the gym changing rooms and attempting to scrounge food where he could; all the while trying not to make this apparent to his peers for fear of embarrassment. The Fund enabled him to complete his studies and he is now as worthy a member of the profession as any of the rest of us. I suspect though that he will be a life-long contributor to the Fund.

Knowledge of a colleague who has been supported is often a great prompt to contribute financially to the amazing work of the Fund but it should not stop there. We might all know someone who now, or at

some future time might need support – and of course, it might be us, although that is perhaps not the most altruistic reason for giving. We live in tough times and the applications for assistance from the Fund have almost doubled in the previous twelve months, emphasising the need felt by potential beneficiaries.

Giving is easy through www.justgiving.com/bdabenevolentfund, or texting DENT15 followed by the amount in pounds to 70070, or by sending cheques to 'BDA Benevolent Fund' at 64 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8YS. In anticipation that it could be you – who contributes – thank you. ■

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.794