

targets to play with them too, I fear the Christmas cheer will soon evaporate.

I urge local communities to forgo de-icing of their driveways to make the COPOUT's job as difficult as possible.

Penny Less, by email

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Restorative

Unique crown

Sir, I would like to bring an extremely unusual case to the notice of your esteemed readers. A 36-year-old male airline cabin crew member attended for an emergency consultation following an incident at breakfast in the hotel in which he had been staying in Dundee. Having had a selection of cooked items from the buffet, he then indulged in toast with marmalade of the famous local variety from a small jar, the type of which is typical in such venues.

Very unusually he did not notice that the top of the pot had fallen on to the toast with the layer of preserve (thick cut, orange) and, on biting down hard, the lid was totally jammed (no pun intended) onto his lower right first permanent molar.

On examination the metal top had sealed itself perfectly around the tooth with an excellent cervical seal and the force had ensured that the biting surface was perfectly sculpted and in balanced occlusion.

Initially I assumed that the patient wanted the offending lid removed but, far from it, he was delighted with the restoration as it resembled a gold crown which would otherwise have cost him a considerable sum. Reassured that the resulting seal would ensure that any residual marmalade would be neutralised and unlikely to initiate caries he thanked me and flew off for destinations unknown.

Thinking that fellow readers anywhere in the world may in future come across this young man, I felt it best to alert the international community to the existence of this, the first ever Long Haul Crown technique.

Evan Lee-Spread, by email

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Patient satisfaction

Sitting comfortably – not an option

Sir, as we head into 2019, I wish to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the UK's longest-serving dental chair – the Dentbus 2000.

First introduced in 1959, this chair has served many a dental practice loyally for decades. Made

of genuine, non-ethically sourced materials and absolutely no padding whatsoever, it has gained the reputation of ultimate longevity, albeit at the expense of comfort.

Patient complaints over the discomfort experienced while in the chair are not uncommon for many dental practices, but we all know that ensuring the patient is not comfortable when sitting, distracts them from less than ideal oral treatment, therefore saving on future tedious correspondence from the General Dental Council over spurious fitness to practise complaints.

The Dentbus 2000 was introduced at a time of change in the UK when dentists were, with the rest of the population, about to enter the swinging 60s.

In contrast to the happy times ahead, the chair stood for straight-forward, no nonsense, utilitarian practicality during a period of healthcare when patients were happy with a less supportive and take-it-or-leave-it approach to oral care.

I, for one, miss those times. Having been a practising dentist for almost six decades now, I treasure the Dentbus 2000 we use in our practice, along with the foot operated drill, underbite headgear, articulator and phantom head.

It is true that our patient list has been shrinking for some time now and that the majority of our remaining patients are in their advancing years, but I believe the old ways are the best and patients appreciate honest, no-frills, no comfort, care. The Dentbus 2000 is the embodiment of this and should be celebrated.

M. R. Grinch, by email

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Fairy services

Fairies braced for adult teeth deluge

Sir, seasons' greetings and I trust you are feeling the festive spirit.

Sadly, I have to bring to your attention an issue which has been raised by my hard-working colleagues, who have their work cut out for them 365 days a year, and not just on December 24.

We at the British Tooth Fairy Association (BTFA) have been receiving growing numbers of complaints from members that patients are often leaving adult teeth underneath their pillows, hoping to receive the statutory payment – currently set at the annual 'retainer' fee of £1.

We must remind your readers – in the hope that they will pass on this information to their patients – that only baby teeth are eligible for these payments.

People must not claim for adult teeth as these are not covered by our Tooth Fairy Fair Policy regulations as created on the Twelfth of Never, Time Immemorial.

We do, however, recommend that patients continue to embrace the 'long-in-the-tooth' policy of encouraging their children to place their baby teeth under their pillow at night to help them cope with the discomfort of this inevitable process.

This deciduously long tradition is, after all, what keeps us in business for the 364 remaining days of the year when Mr Claus is taking his time preparing for the next annual gift jamboree of December 24.

We trust your readers will hear our plea with a sympathetic ear and remember when they themselves benefitted from the deep-rooted practice enjoyed under the 'baby tooth cash reimbursement scheme'.

T. Ink. Bell, by email

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Dental equipment

Spitting our way into Christmas

Sir, at this time of year, it is not unusual for dentists to indulge in the festive spirit, whether that be in the form of eating heartily, excessive gift buying, or, more frequently, drinking spirits to raise one's spirits.

Naturally, we are not condoning excessive alcohol consumption, but wanted to highlight the potential advantages of using a tried and tested device that is right in front of every dentist who wishes to indulge this season by having a tippie or two – the dental spittoon.

Spittoons are a mainstay of every practice across the UK and beyond and offer the perfect receptacle for when a clinician may have over-indulged on the festive 'spirit'.

Now some people may condemn this controversial use of the spittoon, referring to it as nothing more than a makeshift 'sick bucket', but we at the Association of Perpetual Dental Indulgence (APDI) want to dispel these views.

The spittoon is designed to take whatever one throws at it and can be thoroughly sanitised afterwards. Appropriate use of the spittoon is a subjective matter and as long as full sanitisation regulations are followed, we see no problem with use of these devices for those times when a healthcare professional

finds themselves with little choice but to turn to them in an emergency.

Numerous pieces of peer-reviewed research exist to support the long-held belief that one always feels better after an exorcism of matter from the stomach in times of over-indulgence. Accordingly, we recommend use of spittoons for just such a purpose and wish your readers a very 'merry' Christmas.

S.A.L Iva, by email

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Exercise

Exercise – great for your Elf

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of your readership to the interesting findings of a study which neatly demonstrates the benefit of exercise in reducing risk of cardiovascular disease.

Our research team was given the unique opportunity to examine the health and sickness absence records of workers employed by a national chain of department stores.

Specifically, staff employed in the Santa's Grotto division were recruited. We formed the hypothesis that employees in physically active jobs (Elves) have a lower incidence of coronary heart-disease in their middle years than those in physically inactive jobs (Santas).

A large sample of 10,000 workers was considered. Largely, participants were from similar social and economic backgrounds. Elves often had an active work life with responsibility for loading sleighs, reindeer husbandry, construction and warehousing of toys.

Santas led relatively sedentary professional lives which largely involved desk and grotto work such as interpretation of gift lists, invoicing and photo opportunities with children.

In short, our hypothesis proved correct. The Santa cohort experienced statistically significant increases in incidence of cardiovascular disease. These findings held true even after correction for confounders such as sherry and mince pie consumption by the Santa cohort.

The head of the FWU (Festive Workers Union), Mr Claus, was contacted for comment but was not included in the study as it was felt that his punishing nocturnal schedule on 24 December marked him as an outlier, likely to skew results.

The authors suggest a comparison of active dentists with more sedentary practice managers as an interesting area for future research.

A. Jones, by email

1. Morris J N, Heady J A, Raffle P A, Roberts C G, and Parks J W. Coronary heart disease and physical activity of work. *Lancet* 1953; **265**: 1111-1120.

P.S. This fictional report is entirely based on the classic 'London Transport Workers Study' carried out between 1949 and 1952 by Professor Jeremy Morris. This landmark study identified the relationship between exercise and heart disease by supporting the hypothesis 'Men in physically active jobs (bus conductors) have a lower incidence of coronary heart-disease in their middle years than those in physically inactive jobs (bus drivers).'

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Dental equipment

Hands-free heaven

Sir, at Fringe Dental Practice we have always been innovative, albeit in an eclectic fashion. We were paperless before the advent of the computer, maintaining our patient notes more traditionally on tablets of stone.

As for intra-oral cameras, we had no need for these as we were very happy with our lanterns magica. An artistic dental nurse, a transparent plate and a good light source were all that was needed for the patient to see the inside of their mouth projected onto the surgery wall.

Admittedly our innovations have been inspired by creativity, as opposed to practicality. But it's important patients have choice, and I certainly offer an alternative to the norm. I am happy to say I haven't had to start excluding amalgam as I never used it in the first place. My patients were quite ready to have their teeth taken out at the first hint of a carious lesion as they were most reassured by my skills with dentures. I would be happy to share my technique. Let's just say that no chewing gum ever gets thrown away in this practice!

To get to the point of my letter, I was titillated to read that our Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, has urged the NHS¹ to follow the lead of driverless cars and start experimenting with technology, even if it does not work properly.

His visionary approach has empowered me to conduct an experiment that I have been

considering for some time - the introduction of hands-free suction. This will give my dental nurse, the hard-working Mrs Barking, some time to do the other tasks I set, such as making our ground chicory coffee for elevenses. At long last some sensible advice from the Government.

My parting shot is to suggest that the CQC need to update their copy of Bradshaw's map for my area. They have so far not made it to Fringe's only dental practice for our first inspection. I look forward to seeing the sense of wonder on the inspector's face when we are eventually found.

Yours alternatively,

J. Mann, Barking, by carrier pigeon

1. Donnelly L. NHS must follow the lead of driverless cars and embrace technology – even if it doesn't work perfectly, Health Secretary says. *The Telegraph* 2018. Available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/02/nhs-must-follow-lead-driverless-cars-embrace-technology-even/> (accessed November 2018)

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Communication

Patient communication: plain English

Sir, with reference to the story 'Prescribe your patients plain English, doctors ordered' published in *The Times* newspaper on 4 September 2018:

'Dear valued customer/ dental practitioner, What a delight it was to meet you when you called into our dental visitor centre for a bit of a chinwag last week.

Your dentist asked us to see you after you complained about having some soreness from one of your back toothpegs. Some of the pink bits over the tooth were a bit lumpy, there was green gooey stuff coming from it and it smelled horrible. He gave you some tablets to help it, but these gave you a gippy tummy and you stopped them.

I see from your medical history that you had a teensy-weensy heart attack some time ago and take tablets from your doctor for your ticker and some other little blue ones.

It would be a good idea just to pop this tooth out and be done with it.

I have no doubt that everything will be just tickety-boo, but I have given the usual warnings anyway.

Love, your maxillofacial surgeon'

D. Ovenstone, by email

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Note to readers: These letters have been created for the entertainment of readers in the spirit of seasonal good humour and, on the whole, are entirely fictional.