

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.