EDITORIAL

The *BDJ*'s environment

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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.

Famously, in the 1967 film *The Graduate* starring Dustin Hoffman his character, Ben, is given some apparently sound career advice from a family friend; 'I just want to say one word to you Benjamin [dramatic pause] "plastics". I am not sure why the exchange is so iconic, perhaps because of the apparent silliness or superficiality of plastic and what it stands for – or at least what it stood for then.

As a society we seem to have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with plastic and even with the word itself. It has been used as a derogatory term as well as a descriptor of flexibility and in praise of modernity. As a material it is ubiquitous, we quite simply cannot live according to our current lifestyles without it and yet it is increasingly identified with, and accused of, being the environmental villain that is slowly but inexorably strangling the planet. Even governments have taken notice and hopped onto the bandwagon by imposing surcharges on supermarket bags and opening discussions on a range of other environmentally friendly options. These are developments to be welcomed. In dentistry, as good citizens, we are anxious to play our parts too and we are also conscious at the *BDJ* of these issues.

We have been asked in the past about recycling and a recent letter from reader John Pilley asking about the plastic wrapping in which the journal is mailed has prompted me to clarify our policies and actions. The plastic is recyclable and can be deposited at recycling centres or supermarket bag recycling points. Realising that users may not be aware of this, in future we will be adding the recycling logo to the *BDJ*'s delivery sleeve with the wording 'Recycle with bags at larger stores. Check locally kerbside.' We also regularly investigate the feasibility of alternatives. A paper wrapper may be possible and the print and distribution industries are continually assessing this. Crop-based poly films are also available in the form of potato, corn and (perhaps ironically

for dentistry) sugar-based materials but there are currently other environmental issues with these which need to be fully assessed before they could be used on a wide scale.

The *BDJ* itself is printed on acid free Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper. The FSC has as its guiding principle 'Forests For All Forever' and certifies forest managers and owners as a way of ensuring that careful and long-term forest management is recognised. Certification is voluntary but involves an audit of a forest's management by an independent organisation to check that it meets internationally and nationally agreed standards. Forest products like timber and paper can then carry the FSC label, guaranteeing that they come from a well-managed woodland. The *BDJ* is fully recyclable through usual paper recycling

the *BDJ Portfolio* and have plans for further, practical articles on how we can all start to assess and tackle the environmental impacts that result from our daily activities directly and indirectly from patient care.

One very obvious fallout from this has been the Minamata Treaty on mercury use and the consequent agreed phase-down of dental amalgam for environmental reasons. However, all these changes have consequences of their own and a reduced use of amalgam means an increased use of composites. We have published various papers on this and one recently on the environmental impact of dental materials.¹ More are anticipated to follow thanks to financial support received from the Shirley Glasstone Hughes Trust Fund in the form of a research grant

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schemes but using recycled paper as a printing medium is not currently a viable option due to weight and quality considerations but, again, we keep this under regular review. Springer Nature, who publish the *BDJ* on behalf of the BDA, have an annually produced *Responsible Business Report* and the 2017 issue included the statistic that for all their journals they purchased in excess of 31,000 tonnes of paper last year, all of which was from managed sources such as FSC certified.

This same report notes that a high proportion of Springer Nature's environmental impact is due to energy use in offices and in travel. This is a common finding, true too for the BDA and indeed for dental practices. We have published various papers to date on green dentistry within

that has enabled the production of that paper and ongoing work by the research team.

The solutions to these very pertinent issues are not necessarily easy, may not be cheap and may mean changes in lifestyle. However, some things don't change and fiction allows us the luxury of speculating what might have happened to Ben from *The Graduate*. It is sobering to realise that he would now be 72 years old and no doubt retired. Did he take the advice and go into plastics or would he now be a Californian environmental campaigner? ■

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1. Mulligan S, Kakonyi G, Moharamzadeh K, Thornton S F, Martin N. The environmental impact of dental amalgam and resin-based composite materials. *Br Dent J* 2018; **224**: 542–548.