

# Practice *munchkins*

At first glance there seems little in common between food and dentistry except dietary advice to patients. However, **Stephen Hancocks** delves deeper into the practice pantry.

**W**ay before the vexed question of appropriate cross-infection control was as serious an issue as it now undoubtedly is, stories abounded of mince pies being heated in sterilisers for Christmas parties and even the odd pastry having a good steam in an autoclave to make it piping hot on an otherwise chilly winter lunchtime. No truth in such tales I'm sure and certainly nowadays completely out of the question ... unless presumably done in hermetically sealed bags?

Food in the practice very often revolves around lunchtime except for early starters when the chomping sound from a bowl of muesli or the illicit munching of chocopops might be heard as the first patient plods

their way sleepily into reception. The team will fall into two camps here;

those who bring lunch with them and those who 'go out'. Either way it will say something about you, help define your character as to whether you are able to get up early enough to make your own lunch, not be a morning person at all but be organised enough to have prepared it all the night before and fridged it, or be lucky enough to have someone else who gets up early enough or be organised enough the previous evening to do it for you.

Similarly, if you are a 'goer outer' then the psychologists will also be able to pick through the socio-economics of it. Are you wealthy enough not to have to worry about the paying £3.25 for two rounds of bread filled with cheese and pickle when you could have done it yourself for 17.5p/slice (or had someone else do it for you for 17.5p/slice plus a bunch of flowers or a cinema ticket once in a while when the cheddar suddenly starts to get noticeably thin)? Or, are you just the outdoor sort who needs to escape for a while and perhaps eat *al fresco* in the park, behind the garage or in a bus shelter because the team's driving you nuts?

Then there's the actual content. There is no doubt a new skill to be learned in 'reading' the constituents of a lunch box in much the same way as palm readers scan hands and clairvoyants scrutinise tarot cards. Play the game yourself. Visualise a supermarket brand packet

of salt and vinegar crisps, tuna sandwiches on white bread and a bar of chocolate packed into an old ice cream container and you can get a rough idea of whose it is, can't you? I'm right aren't I? And if you need further

help, try and guess the sort of person who goes to the fridge and lifts out a Fortnum and Mason's crockery dish with

thick-cut wholemeal bread (no crusts) liberally spread with organic butter, filled with poached Scottish salmon in dill sauce accompanied by cheese straws in a small side dish and rounded off with semi-skimmed goat's milk yoghurt – passion fruit and mint flavour. And a napkin. Good, we're on the same wavelength here I can see.

Not that, whatever the ingredients, there is a practice in the land that doesn't at some stage have a 'whose is this (insert name of smelly/gone off/mouldy) item?' moment in the lifetime of the staff room fridge or cupboard over the sink. Once again, true to form it is usually the same owner every time, being as how they always seem to manage to forget leaving a half-finished carton of cream or an opened tin of pilchards despite it staring them in the face or assaulting their nostrils for a number of days before someone else takes it as their duty to ask the question and dump the offending item in the peddle bin – where it festers for another three days until the cleaner refuses to empty it as it niffs so much.

But if it is food in the practice that creates the fuel for wonderment, gossip and perhaps friction on a day to day basis, it has to be the set piece meals and outings which provide the mythology surrounding the team and its members. Christmas dinners have to rate top of the list here. The colleague who, having drunk one too many glasses of the Sangria fruit punch, moved on to several refills of Chablis before gobbling down a large prawn cocktail, a full turkey roast with trimmings, topped with Christmas pud, brandy butter and two large measures of Baileys on ice – then returns it all to the pavement outside will inevitably go down in the annals of the practice history – especially if it's the boss!

None of which even blows a cooling puff over the surface of drinks in the practice and who makes them, mugs and who rinses them or tea bags and jars of coffee, whose job is it to replenish them? The beverage cart will have to wait for another time, I'm off to marg some granary and munch a packet of beef and onion – work that one out.

