

Pitifully superficial

I read with interest, and wry amusement, the article *The rise of the dental nurse* by dentist Anne M. Milarvie (*Vital* summer 2008, pages 28–29) which managed to cover more than half a century of changes in dental nursing, including statutory registration, without once mentioning the force behind this change – the BADN!

This article was not only pitifully superficial, but also factually incorrect on a number of points:

- Formal dental nurse training did not begin in the 1930s but in 1943 when the newly formed Dental Nurses and Assistants Society offered the very first dental nursing examination. This led to the formation of the National Examining Board (another dental nursing institution which Dr Milarvie managed to ignore!) which remained part of the Association until the mid-1980s, when it became a separate organisation.
- The ‘concept of dental nurse registration’ was not conceived by the Nuffield Foundation in 1993. ABDSA, as the Society had become, had campaigned for registration since its formation and in 1964 established the Voluntary National Register of Dental Nurses (also ignored by Dr Milarvie) which it administered until its closure at the end of 2005. Indeed, part of my role as BADN Chief Exec included being Registrar of the VNR.
- The Report of the Nuffield Inquiry into the Training and Education of Personnel Auxiliary to Dentistry (1993), which is what I presume Dr Milarvie means by the ‘Nuffield Foundation’, after receiving evidence from a number of sources, including ABDSA, supported the recommendations that dental nurses should be registered. The Working Group formed by the then Chief Dental Officer, Dame Margaret Seward, to look into dental nurse registration and which included then BADN Chairman Pat Harle, supported the findings of the Nuffield Inquiry and recommended that dental nurses be registered with the GDC.
- That the term ‘DSA’ is no longer used and has been replaced by ‘dental nurse’ is not something which just happened by chance – it was a decision taken by the Association. At its AGM in 1994, Association members voted to change the title to dental nurse and the name of the Association to ‘British Association of Dental Nurses’. The National Examining Board followed suit later that year, as did the GDC’s Dental Nurse Standards and Training Advisory Board.
- It is not possible to pass the NEBDN National Certificate without clinical experience, nor do



successful National candidates then require two years’ work experience in order to become registered. Two years’ full time chairside experience is currently required in order to pass the National Certificate – successful candidates are immediately eligible for registration.

- The term ‘nurse’ refers only to a general nurse – the correct term is ‘dental nurse’.

The concept of statutory registration of dental nurses was, during the 1990s, vehemently opposed by many dentists and particularly by the British Dental Association and the General Dental Practitioners’ Association. It is safe to say that, were it not for the enormous amount of work done by the Association, and particularly by Pat Harle and Paula Sleight, and the support of Dame Margaret, dental nurse registration would never have happened.

The British Association of Dental Nurses, as the Association has been called since 1994, was founded in 1940 in Leyland by dentist Philip Grundy and Bunty Leigh, his dental nurse.

It may suit some dentists, such as Dr Milarvie, to fondly imagine that dental nurses are dependent upon their patronising munificence for the evolution and development of dental nursing as a profession, but this couldn’t be further from the truth. All major developments in dental nursing over the past 50 years or so – the formation of the National Examining Board, the Training Advisory Service (now the NEBDN’s Quality Assurance), the Voluntary National Register, the introduction of statutory registration, the NVQ and so on – have all been largely driven by the Association. The fact that dental nurses may claim tax relief on laundering their uniforms, or on the payment of their

GDC registration fees, for example, is due to BADN having negotiated these allowances with HMRC. BADN holds regular meetings with the GDC, BDA, the Chief Dental Officer, and other appropriate dental and non-dental bodies and is constantly working to promote the dental nursing profession. This is all the more extraordinary in that all BADN Council members and officers are working dental nurses who receive no financial recompense for their activities on behalf of dental nurses which are carried out in their own time.

Many dental nurses are, unfortunately, unaware of – or oblivious to – the enormous amount of work carried out by BADN on their behalf. I am very surprised, and extremely disappointed, that a reputable magazine such as *Vital* should print such an article which completely ignores the substantial contribution of the Association, without which dental nurses today would not be on the point of professional registration and recognition as valued members of the dental team.

Pamela Swain, BADN Chief Executive

Dr Anne Milarvie responds: The fundamental purpose of my article was to highlight to colleagues the value of our dental nurses in helping to train our vocational dental practitioners.

It was, of course, interesting to read about the history of the BADN in Ms Swain’s letter. However, the main point of my article was that being shown appreciation is essential. Far from being patronising, I, together with many dental practitioners, readily recognise the efforts of our teams. That was the fundamental message that I wished to convey and is one upon which I assume that I and Ms Swain can agree.