

## Too late

Shaun Sellars continues his series on ethical dilemmas in dentistry which appears in every second issue of the *BDJ*.



I'm fortunate enough to work in Bury St Edmunds, a beautiful market town in rural Suffolk. Historically one of the most important towns in the country, it's now more famous as the home of brewing giant Greene King. More recently, it's become a beacon of the issues within dentistry, with the mainstream press featuring several cases of people unable to access dental care. Dentaid, the dental charity more associated with providing care in developing countries, has made multiple visits to the town and surrounding areas to deliver much-needed emergency services. The underlying problem is simple. There are simply not enough dentists in the area. And while the private sector here is relatively buoyant, patients are crying out for an NHS service.

Suffolk is the rule rather than the exception in this regard. Colleagues report recruitment issues in locations as geographically diverse as Cumbria, Lincolnshire and Cornwall, as rural areas have long struggled to recruit dentists in both primary and secondary care. The

rolling hills and chocolate box landscapes may be attractive for some. Yet, the personal isolation and relatively high levels of socioeconomic deprivation are off-putting for many, especially those in the early stages of their career.

That leaves us as a profession with limited options. Either incentivise rural recruitment or ask dentists in those rural areas to work longer hours and see more patients. We can safely rule out the idea of increasing working hours. All of us in the profession are aware of the realities of burnout, which has come to the forefront given the particular challenges of the last few years. This leaves us to work out how to make practising in more remote areas more attractive.

Traditionally, financial enticements have been offered to attract recruits. While the golden hello is not uncommon, the fiscal carrot is clearly not enough to fill the skills gap. What's needed is a more holistic offering which considers both monetary and professional benefits. Imagine a situation where young rural recruits have a structured career pathway within NHS primary care. Tie this to funded postgraduate education to help practitioners develop and invest in

technology for remote practices, such as in digital dentistry providing scanners, 3D printers and associated training. In addition, funding should be allocated for practice-based research to allow the whole profession to benefit. Together, the investment in people and equipment make for a truly modern service providing cutting-edge dentistry.

Some may decry the channelling of resources to more remote areas as a form of positive discrimination, and to an extent, that would be correct. But residents of rural areas are disproportionately struggling to find care and have done so for decades. However, the more pressing concern is that of political apathy for improvement in dentistry. Such radical change can only come with long-term strategies and guaranteed investment. Even then, increasing rural access wouldn't happen overnight. Unless something changes quickly, the end is nigh for NHS dentistry, and in many rural areas, it may already be too late.

## Birmingham abuzz for BOC this September

Registration is now open for the 2022 British Orthodontic Conference (BOC), the largest event in the UK dedicated to dental professionals with an interest in orthodontics. This year's theme is Most Smile.Debate – inspired by the What3words address of the ICC Birmingham. The inventor of What3words, Jack Waley-Cohen, will be addressing the conference about how the App came about.

At the ICC, between the 15–17 September, there will be a line-up of hugely respected speakers from the UK and around the world including Dr Michael Mosley, Sandra Tai, Lars Christensen, Björn Ludwig, Ewa Czochrowska and Pawel Placwicz.

David Spary will be delivering the prestigious Northcroft memorial lecture and on a wide-ranging programme there

are also parallel sessions on Driving Private Practice and for those considering a career in orthodontics. There is also a well-devised programme for both orthodontic therapists and nurses.

The BOC social programme always proves popular and the 2022 Gala is being held at the Birmingham Library – a venue with a difference. The beautiful Town Hall will be hosting the exclusive banquet and there will be plenty of opportunity for those wishing to see the sights and heritage of Britain's second city. Indeed, if you haven't been to the centre of Birmingham for some years, you may not recognise it. There has been significant investment ahead of hosting the Commonwealth Games in July.

Trevor Hodge, Chair of the BOC Committee, said: 'I am delighted to welcome

everyone to the city where I did my postgraduate training and of which I have a lot of fond memories. We have a pre-conference course on autotransplantation, two parallel sessions, a fantastic programme for therapists and nurses as well as excellent social events for which the BOC has become famous. As in 2021, the conference will be hybrid so there is an option for those who cannot attend in person to still benefit from the excellent education on offer. I look forward to seeing you all!

To book, visit <https://boc-birmingham-2022.reg.buzz/>.

An early bird discount is available for all bookings made before 30 June and a combined team rate is on offer too so that the whole team can go along, learn a lot and have fun.