Members’ Corner: Dr Stuart Johnston

In this issue of WDC, we are pleased to have FDI Dental Practice Committee and Dental Amalgam Task Team (DATT) member, Dr Stuart Johnston discuss his involvement with FDI World Dental Federation & share his vision for oral health.

WDC: As a practicing dentist, what made you decide to devote your time to addressing issues affecting dental practice at an international level?

Dr Stuart Johnston: I initially became involved with organized dentistry at the local level because I was dissatisfied with the system of dentistry in the UK. After some time, I became Chairman of the local body and went on to represent the UK at the national level.

People gave me jobs to do and I didn’t say “no”. I enjoyed it... I learned and I was willing to work hard, making a better future for myself and colleagues in the UK. “Accidently” I had the opportunity to attend the FDI Congress in New Delhi, in 2004, as a representative of the British Dental Association. I wasn’t sure what to make of it at first, it seemed very complex. But after this experience, I reflected on the opportunities FDI involvement presented and quite liked it—the complexity of it, it was something completely new. I wanted to stand FDI, what we could do, how I could help raise the profile of my home association there. There is a symbiotic relationship, representing BDA at FDI and bringing benefits back to dentists in the UK.

You were recently invited to join FDI Dental Amalgam Task Team (DATT). What is the rationale behind the formation of DATT? It is fascinating work—the way these colleagues have communicated with one another around the world, all cooperating, & the quality of debate is superb. The FDI Council mandated that a Dental Amalgam Task Team be established to ensure that the international dental community & issues regarding dental amalgam were properly & accurately represented in United Nations discussions regarding mercury and would be based on the best available science. For details see "International Interdisciplinary Negociating Committee www.unep.org/hazardous-substances/Mercury/Negotiations/NG1/tahd/5524/I language/en-US/Default.aspx."

The DATT consists of a representative from each of the FDI standing committees, three Council representatives & where required he supplemented with subject matter experts.

Where does the DATT stand now and what role does it play in FDI overall mission? At the UNEP meeting in Stockholm, 7-11 June 2010, I was privileged to represent FDI Dental Amalgam Task Team. This meeting saw a continuation of the process begun in November and we had the opportunity to lobby delegates to our position to avoid an all-out amalgam ban. DATT is looking to develop in formation for member NAs to take back to their countries to communicate with their governments directly. It will be governments who vote on this, so we require a team effort to achieve the desired result.

In regards to dental amalgam, it is not a health issue because the dental profession has a significant body of evidence that the use of amalgam as a restorative material is safe with respect to human health. However it is the broader considerations with regards to mercury that the intergovernmental negotiating committee is addressing.

Is FDI developing a position on environmental waste? We must be seen as doing everything we can, including:

- Make sure all waste is collected properly in dental surgery & properly disposed of & recylced wherever possible, to avoid contamination.
- Move away from bulk mercury, which can be misappropriated for small scale gold mining, towards capsule mercury, which avoids spillage.

What does the FDI World Dental Federation offer to the dentist? The world is changing and FDI helps us to understand this change at international or global level. For example, amalgam is prime issue. FDI can represent this at the world level for the dental profession. Another example is GCC and how it fits together, there is serendipity—the strategy for dealing with caries sees a reduction in need for amalgam.

There is a huge opportunity to make a real difference through FDI. For some associations from more advanced countries, part of FDI’s work is the duty to help colleagues in developing areas. There is a global responsibility which is enhanced now by amalgam issue—this shows that we are one world, working together for better oral health.

What plans does the FDI Dental Practice Committee (DPC) have for 2010? I have been a Member of DPC for just over a year. It is nice to meet with colleagues and see how we approach problems differently. It can be difficult to produce the consensus statements due to different legal systems and philosophies of care, so when we produce a statement it is even more satisfying. Benefits of being part of the DPC include meeting more of the people involved in FDI work, and feeling more that I am part of the team.

Looking at purpose of the committee, there will be fewer but more focus projects with the DPC collaborating with other committees to contribute to FDI strategic objectives. We are looking at the dental team, risk management in dental practice, indemnity, infection control and waste management.

Also we have been approached by colleagues at the Indian Dental Association, which is a positive development.

Where do you see your work taking you with FDI?

I am enjoying what I am doing now. It means a juggling act with FDI involvement, the BDA where I am chair of the Representative Body, running dental practice, and European work.

Dr Stuart Johnston qualified in 1972 from Cardiff Dental School and has worked in his own practice for the last 52 years. He is the DPC member on the FDI Dental Amalgam Task Team (DATT).

FDI Revisits Suntec Center, Singapore

Eight months after the successful 2009 FDI Annual World Dental Congress at the Suntec International Convention & Exhibition Centre, Singapore, FDI returned to Singapore to participate in the biennial International Dental Exhibition and Meeting (IDEM) that took place from 16 to 18 April 2010.

Dr Roberto Vianna, FDI President, was present at IDEM Singapore to promote FDI and to extend FDI’s spirit of partnership among participating stake holders.

“IDEM Singapore brings together many facets of FDI’s work towards improving oral and general health. Together with the Singapore Dental Association, FDI develops outstanding Continuing Education programmes — based on relevant and timely topics for the profession—which not only play an important role in the development of dentistry & dental professionals, but also in advocating the importance of oral healthcare to the population," said Dr Vianna at the IDEM opening ceremony.

Organised by Koelnmesse and the Singapore Dental Association (SDA), in cooperation with FDI World Dental Federation, the 2010 edition of IDEM Singapore delivered cutting-edge insights into the very latest in dental technology, techniques and patient treatment. The 2010 Scientific Conference at IDEM Singapore, which featured 18 international thought leaders in their respective fields, brought to the fore new protocols in patient treatment. Moreover, the most recent innovations that help dentists minimize the risks involved in advanced
"I feel proud of the World Health Organization, including the World Health Federation, which reflects the diversity of health, with FDI neighbours of the world. Also significant is the multicultural population, in a country with four official languages, located in heart of Europe and well connected to the rest of the world. Also significant is the fact that Geneva is a Capital of Health, with FDI neighbours including the World Health Organization, World Heart Federation, International Federation of Red Cross, and Médecins sans frontières. Furthermore the consolidation of FDI businesses under a single entity provides more simplified management & a favourable taxation environment.

Attending the ceremony were FDI Council members and staff, FDI members, corporate sponsors, partners and other NGOs. Mr Stéphane Graher, Directeur au Service de la Promotion Economique du Canton de Genève, and Mr André Klopmann, Chargé des ONG internationales, Canton de Genève, represented the Canton de Genève.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was performed by FDI President, Roberto Viana; FDI Executive Director, David Alexander; and for the Canton de Genève, André Klopmann. Guests enjoyed a brief tour of the office on the 5th floor having a sneak peak of FDI’s new “home” and FDI’s colourful windows.

The Grand Opening ceremony coincided with FDI Council meeting. Despite the Iceland volcanic ash incident which made traveling difficult, a good number of guests could still attend the ceremony. However, some aspects of the event were postponed, such as the bidding for the 2015 congress. This has now has been scheduled to take place in September in Salvador.

Excerpt from FDI President’s speech

Roberto Viana: "I feel proud that FDI World Dental Federation—one of the world’s oldest international health profession organizations—has found a new home in this city, with neighbours including the World Health Organization, United Nations, and World Trade Organization."

"...From our new home in Geneva, we are well positioned to collaborate with our many partners in health, continuing to serve as the worldwide, unified voice for oral health; to promote oral health globally; & to deliver excellence in continuing professional education & access to care to communities worldwide.”