New dental school for Scotland

Scotland's First Minister has opened a dental school in an area where more than 51,000 people do not have a dentist.

First Minister Alex Salmond formally opened the £17m Aberdeen Dental School.

The school, which is affiliated to the University of Aberdeen, opened to students in 2008, with students transferring to the new building last November.

The school will produce 20 fully-qualified dentists every year.

The new complex includes units for radiography, restorative dentistry and consultant orodontics, as well as dental laboratories, student laboratories and offices.

The Scottish government hopes the dental school will lead to a rise in the number of people entering the dental profession in Scotland - and in doing so reduce waiting lists. Recent figures showed that nearly 80,000 people in Scotland are still without an NHS dentist, with NHS Grampian having more than 31,000 on its waiting list.

North-east Tory MSP Nanette Milne said: “There have been a number of difficulties in recent years with regards to patient access to NHS dentists in the Grampian area and I hope that the opening of the Aberdeen Dental School will help increase the number of dental students in training and the number of dentists who remain in the Grampian area after training.”

SNP MSP for Aberdeen North Brian Adam also expressed hope that the dental school will make a difference and said: “The Scottish Government and NHS Grampian are investing in North East dentistry to tackle the long waits for lists and poor oral hygiene in Aberdeen and Grampian which this government inherited.

“Since the SNP came to power we have seen the number of dentists in Grampian rise to 504, with an increase of 21 last year and nearly 4,000 people have been taken off the waiting list.

This state of the art dental school will see 20 new dentists graduate every year from Aberdeen. Hopefully we can retain these dentists in Grampian and with their help make those long queues of people signing up to a dentist, a thing of the past.”

Rise in tooth whitening

Despite the economic downturn, there has been a rise in the demand for tooth whitening products and treatments, according to a recent survey.

A recent survey conducted by market research group Mintel found that around a third are concerned by the look of their teeth and 18 per cent do not like to show their teeth in photographs.

Tooth whitening has become a key reason for people to visit their dentists and sales of tooth whitening products rose to £57m last year and are predicted to increase by 86 per cent to £289m by the end of 2010.

The trend towards using tooth whitening treatments is being actively promoted by celebrities such as Simon Cowell who advocates Sonicare with all X Factor finalists being sent a Philips Sonicare as part of their make-over.

A healthy looking smile has been shown to influence well-being, enhance self-confidence and make people appear more youthful.

Philips has created ‘Patient Profiles’ information cards and fact sheets to help dental professionals communicate better with their patients and show the benefits of its Sonicare HealthyWhite toothbrush.

The fact sheets can be personalised with a practices’ details and downloaded for free from the Sonicare website www.sonicare.co.uk/dp.
Dental nurses petition government

Nearly 600 dental nurses have signed a petition on the Number 10 website calling for the government to put pressure on the General Dental Council to reduce the Annual Retention Fee.

The General Dental Council (GDC) decided to freeze the Annual Retention Fee (ARF) of £56 for dental care professionals for the third year running.

However, dental nurses claim it is unfair that dental professionals on higher salaries pay the same ARF.

An online No 10 petition needs to get at least 500 signatories before it will reach the Prime Minister’s office.

The petition lodged by Xy-anthe Lambert says: “We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to reduce the annual Retention Fee for Dental Nurses to ensure a fair comparison against the higher salaries of hygienists/therapists and lab technicians, compared to Dental Nurses lower pay.”

She adds: “I would like to highlight that dental nurses are on a lesser wage than hygienists/therapists and laboratory technicians, but are expected to pay the same annual retention fee as them.”

However, Pam Swain, chief executive of the British Dental Nurses Association (BADN) believes that the most effective way of getting things changed is to join the BADN.

The BADN is currently gathering information about the salaries of dental nurses so it can highlight the low pay they get and present its case to the GDC.

GDC president, Angie McBlain claims that the GDC fails to take into account the fact that many dental nurses only work part-time and yet are expected to pay the same as hygienists and therapists (who are paid a minimum of £25,000 when newly qualified).

BADN want a complete revision of the registration fee to include lower fees for dental nurses, reduced fees for all part time registrants and payments to be spread across at least two instalments over the year, as well as for BADN to be consulted fully on all matters concerning dental nurse registration in the future.

Career opportunities event

The one-day event ‘Career Opportunities in U.K. Dentistry’ celebrates its tenth year this February.

The event organised by the British Dental Association and UCL Eastman Dental Institute is being held on 12 February at a new and bigger venue – the Central Hall Westminster, located opposite Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.

The conference is aimed at vocational dental practitioners, young dentists, anyone considering a change of career or returning to dentistry after a career break, as well as dentists from overseas.

The day will consist of a programme of lectures by knowledgeable speakers. There will also be an exhibition with employers of dentists and organisations who support dentists throughout their careers.

Professor Jimmy Steele will be making the keynote address discussing challenges and opportunities that have arisen from the Steele Report.

There will also be a panel debate attended by Stephen Porter, professor of Oral Medicine and director at the UCL Eastman Dental Institute Susie Sanderton, chair, British Dental Association Executive Board; and Jimmy Steele, professor of Oral Health Services Research, School of Dental Sciences, Newcastle University.

For more information about the event, please visit: http://www.eastman.ucl.ac.uk.
GDPUK round-up

With the GDPUK online community remaining a continual bubble of activity over the holiday period, forum founder Tony Jacobs says there’s much to look forward to in 2010

GDPUK readers were busy through the December holiday period with the site even busier in early January when the snow meant more colleagues were at home with time to spare. The activity on the site suggested that catching up with the practice book-keeping was the last thing on their mind.

In the early part of the New Year, a topic was raised asking what dentists were talking about 10 years ago. I had a look back in the archives of messages posted in January 2000, and although I cannot promise it was a perfect and thorough review of all the postings at that time, some of the topics might jog your memory.

Debates from that time concerned the bleaching of teeth, the different methods, and the pros and cons of each style of treatment. Then there were discussions on the erosion of teeth, pregnancy, and NHS services in specific towns and holistic dentistry. There were also arguments as there are now, about the effectiveness of the British Dental Association (BDA) in representing the profession. Obviously this is a perpetual discussion point, and may always be.

Today’s hot topics

Back to the present, I will tell you about the hot topics now. The concept of the use of homeopathy in dentistry was raised with one or two proponents. This argument was attacked by a group of members, citing many reasons why this was unscientific. To give non-members a flavour of how severely debated these topics can be on GDPUK as a vibrant forum, this topic attracted 107 replies within a few days.

On a lighter note, there was an informal competition to post pictures showing the lowest temperature on a car’s external thermometer during the period of snow [I managed -11°C in Manchester]. Travel in the snow, and some beautiful views from practice windows were posted, allowing for expressions of wonder and awe.

Other topics included advice on instrument washers, a discussion on lesser-known implant brands, section 63 courses and their organisation, as well as a small dental Christmas carol competition.

UDA claim campaign

Meanwhile, Ian Gordon started a campaign supporting NHS practices being able to claim some reduction in UDAs targeted for this year due to the disruption caused by the snow in early January. When the subject of the weather was broached, the whole country was unanimous in how much dental practices had been affected by the severe weather conditions.

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