Statistics are wonderful things. Depending on how pretty you make them, they can say anything you want them to. For example, last week I was named player of the match for my rugby side with 75 per cent of the votes. Now that is not bad going, but when you look deeper you will find that actually only four of the team voted, and I didn’t vote for myself! (not that I’m telling anyone else that, I was player of the match don’t you know!) Now, I am not for one minute suggesting that the statistics reported by Denplan don’t stand up to further scrutiny, or that the Information Centre statistics regarding dental access are incorrect; just that sometimes you need to step back and look objectively at how the data is put together. A perfect time to practice those EBD skills!

For those budding dentists looking for direction, this week (Friday) sees the Career Opportunities in UK Dentistry conference in London, organised by the BDA and UCL Eastman Dental Institute. Having attended the event before, I know how useful this conference is. This year, the keynote speaker is Prof Jimmy Steele, who will be discussing the challenges and opportunities his report has highlighted. It will be interesting to see how the dentists who will be directly affected by the changes implemented by the Steele Review in the future view what is happening in the profession.

Do you have an opinion or something to say on any Dental Tribune UK article? Or would you like to write your own opinion for our guest comment page? If so don’t hesitate to write to: The Editor, Dental Tribune UK Ltd, 4th Floor, Treasure House, 19-21 Hatton Garden, London, EC1 8BA Or email: lisa@dentaltribuneuk.com

Editorial comment

Lies, damn lies and statistics

The health trust, NHS Mid Essex, is offering free dental treatment to people who have not seen a dentist for two years.

The treatment includes a check up, fillings, root canal work, extraction, crowns, dentures and bridges and is being offered to people in Chelmsford, Braintree, Maldon, Witham, Halstead and surrounding areas.

Twenty dental practices across the area are taking part in the scheme, running from 1 February to 31 March.

Dehila McNair, assistant commissioning manager for primary care, said: “We have set a priority to improve NHS dental care as part of our commitment to improving access to NHS services. As well as making sure that services are available locally, it is important to encourage people to see a dentist in order to avoid health problems.”

Free work

The British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry has joined forces with the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry to host an international conference in London.

A spokeswoman for the BACD said: “Dental professionals, exhibiting partners and educators will be brought together by their passion for cosmetic dentistry.

The event on 23-25 September is being hosted by the AACD, BACD, Dental University of Paris Study Group, the European Society of Cosmetic Dentistry, the German Society of Cosmetic Dentistry, and the Swedish Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.

For more information call Suzie Rowlands 0207 612 4166

Joining forces with America

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Website to support oral mucositis sufferers

A new website has been launched, giving advice and information to people suffering from oral mucositis.

The painful condition, normally associated with both chemotherapy and radiotherapy, can prevent sufferers from talking and eating even - and in severe cases a feeding tube is sometimes necessary so the patient can get the nutrients required to continue with the cancer therapy.

In a survey of nurses, it was identified as the most debilitating and significant problem associated with cancer therapy.

Iain McGill, president, Europe and International, at EUSA Pharma (sponsors of the mouthsmadegood website), said: “Oral Mucositis is a particularly common and often devastating side effect of cancer therapy. We hope that we’ve provided a useful and informative forum, where people can share their own insights and help others overcome this lesser known side effect of cancer treatment”.

The new site provides information about the condition itself and its symptoms, the type of people at risk, the consequences of Oral mucositis and how to manage the condition.

The site also enables sufferers and carers to share their experiences, comment and ask questions as well as upload their own video blog to help others in the same situation.

For more information please visit the new website www.mouthsmadegood.com.

BDA exhibition celebrates dental pioneer’s life

The British Dental Association is holding an exhibition celebrating the life and achievements of Victorian dental pioneer, Sir John Tomes.

The exhibition features a number of Tomes’s inventions including his patients’ chair and hand instruments. The design of his forceps, which are also in the exhibition, has been acknowledged as the forerunner of those used today.

Peter Ward, chief executive of the BDA, said: “It is the BDA’s 150th birthday this year, so it is particularly fitting that we are celebrating the life of Sir John Tomes, our first president, with this exhibition.”

“His achievements and innovations have had a profound influence on the way dentistry is organised, regulated and practiced today, and every dentist owes him a huge debt of thanks. This exhibition highlights his achievements with some remarkable exhibits and we are proud to be hosting it.”

Other items in the exhibition include his work room book containing drawings of sections of teeth and bone, the letter from the Royal Society awarding him his Fellowship and his cuttings book, which includes the telegraph informing him that the 1878 Dentist’s Act - the legislation that confined the use of the term ‘dentist’ to qualified or experienced people had been passed.

Tomes was a clinical, technical and political pioneer in dentistry. As well as being the first registered dentist and the first president of the BDA, he was the first dentist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society due to his dental research.

Martin Rees, president of the Royal Society said: “In its anniversary year, the Royal Society is delighted to be working with the BDA Museum to celebrate Royal Society Fellow Sir John Tomes.

“Our past Fellows share a remarkable role in history, advancing our understanding of the world around us in extraordinary ways. They truly are the giants on whose shoulders we have stood and we hope that this exhibition will inspire renewed interest in science and help us all to see further.”

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The exhibition can be viewed at the British Dental Association until 4 March.

It is open during normal museum opening hours (Tuesdays & Thursdays 1-4pm), but visitors are welcome at other times by appointment. Admission is free.

Mouths’ fifteen minutes of fame in dental surgery

Patients at a dentist surgery in Scotland will be able to watch what is going on inside their mouths on a flat screen TV, as they undergo treatment.

Mark Skimming has set up the £1m Dentistry practice in Queens Park, Glasgow, which looks set to be the largest NHS dental practice in Scotland.

The flat screen TV will be in front of his dentist’s chair so patients can see the inside of their mouths using a special camera while they are having their dental treatment.

He also wants to install a television screen in the ceiling so people can watch DVDs during long procedures.

By 2012, the surgery, is expected to have 10,000 patients and six dentists.

People who are unable to take time off work for dental appointments will be able to visit the dentist up till 9pm on a Monday night or alternatively on a Saturday morning.

Dr Skimming, who studied at the Royal College of Surgeons, is set to become the youngest Masters qualified restorative dentist in the UK later this year.

His wife Claire, 26, is helping with the laundry and co-ordinating the room book containing drawings of sections of teeth and bone, the letter from the Royal Society awarding him his Fellowship and his cuttings book, which includes the telegraph informing him that the 1878 Dentist’s Act - the legislation that confined the use of the term ‘dentist’ to qualified or experienced people had been passed.

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Dental care providers are now able to assess the numeracy and literacy skills of their practice teams with the help of a free online tool.

The Skills for Health sector skills council has launched the first sector-specific initial assessment tool.

Skills for Health divisional manager Rosemarie Simpson commented: “The importance of literacy and numeracy skills in healthcare can’t be understated. ‘They’re key to delivering high quality patient care, as well as improving the career prospects of staff.’

“Healthcare staff generally have higher literacy and numeracy levels than some other workforce sectors, but many people will not have checked their skills for some time. ‘The online tools provide an effective way to identify skill levels, show what people are good at and identify what they might need to brush up on.’

An NHS Skills for Life survey carried out in 2005 found that within NHS England, 26 per cent of staff have literacy skills below Level 2 (equivalent to a GCSE at A*-C), while a greater proportion would benefit from refreshing their numeracy skills.

The free-to-use online tools are designed specifically for staff working in healthcare in the UK and draw on ‘real-life’ scenarios.

Examples include listening to messages from patients, interpreting instructions, tables and charts and calibrating equipment.

Another key feature is ‘intelligent’ software that analyses users’ responses and modifies questions according to the level they are working at – meaning that the tools can be used across a range of healthcare grades and roles.

Staff who use the tools receive an assessment indicating their literacy and numeracy levels, which can be used to support skills development activities and a route into career progression.

Skills for Health claim that using the tool will lead to improved patient care, better clinical governance and higher staff retention levels.

It recommends that the tools be used as part of a ‘whole organisation’ approach in which literacy and numeracy assessment is embedded in staff development processes.

The tools can be used as part of induction, a personal development review or prior to or as part of training.

The Initial Assessment Tools are designed to indicate the approximate skill levels of an individual between Entry Level 1 and Level 2 in the English qualification framework, and SCQF levels 2 to 5 in the Scottish framework.

Each online tool takes approximately 25 minutes to complete, and individuals may be supported by a manager, trainer, or Union Learning Representative.

Alternatively, they may access the tools themselves. The initial assessment can be used as part of a learning programme, following on from a skills check and leading on to diagnostic assessments.

They can also be used alongside an NVQ/SVQ or Adult Apprenticeship, and can be carried out on an individual basis or in a group setting.

They were commissioned by the Extending Participation team within Skills for Health, and can be accessed via: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/IATool.