Latest thinking in risk management
Shaun Howe reviews this year’s Dental Protection Premier Symposium

I consider myself very lucky to receive an invite to Dental Protection’s Premier Symposium most years. This outstanding event takes place around late November, early December each year and brings together some of the latest thinking in risk management as well as supporting the work of dental professionals in practice and research by offering the Premier Awards which encourages the improvement of patient care in six key areas: ethics and professionalism, record keeping, infection control, team working and skill mix, consent and communication and health and safety.

The line-up is invariably impressive and this year again provided great education, reasons why we should reflect and also extremely entertaining. Whilst there is an obvious emphasis on risk management this is not the whole beast and as the variety of speakers showed, it had something for all the team to learn.

Professor Trevor Burke gave a presentation titled “Fools rush in…”; the main thrust of his discussion was regarding the evidence base that we should use to offer the very best use of materials when treating patients. The professor offered some insight into the evolution of composite materials yet examined the weak evidence base that is sometimes used to support the use of various materials as well as the longevity of restorations. He cleverly used several blank slides during his presentation to demonstrate the lack of evidence for certain materials; this man is so engaging and as the talk progressed he used numerous versions of the song “fools rush in” to highlight aspects of his presentation.

A tough act to follow but Dr Lloyd Searson of Kings College certainly rose to the occasion with his presentation “…where angels fear to tread” where he discussed how poor planning of implants, their placement and selection criteria, can lead to future problems and he stated “poor planning today will lead to problems tomorrow”. A really interesting lecture that examined the evidence around why implants fail and also discussed the pitfalls for practitioners placing implants in the aesthetic zone which can produce its own set of complex issues. This was all combined with an examination of the levels of training that some feel adequate to place implants against perhaps more conventional accepted standards.

“When good enough” was just not good enough was presented by Dr Jason Leitch who is the Clinical Director of the Quality Unit in the Health and Social Care Directorate NHS Scotland. I have met this enigmatic gentleman on a few occasions and it is always a pleasure to hear him talk. He realised that the inequalities of healthcare standards in his native Scotland were outrageous-twisted as parts of Glasgow would have a very low life expectancy compared to other more affluent areas where there may be as much as a 15 years difference. But it was/as not as simple as that; he highlighted how that by applying set standards regardless of location that the patient journey is improved as well as the outcomes. This is however compounded by the lack of available funding due to these constrained times we are experiencing. Informative, clever and witty and he was quite kind to his predominately English audience.

The Premier Awards preceded lunch and were awarded as follows:

Under-graduate:
1st prize: Junaid Nayaar and Mervyn Hustin (Dublin) for producing an audit checklist for panoramic radiography to reduce unnecessary exposures

DCPs:
1st prize: Alison Love (dental hygienist Cardiff) for a literature review of the workplace prevalence of musco-skeletal disorders amongst dental hygienists. (Alison is a second year and I hope I get invited again.)
2nd prize: Keri Fish (Dental Nurse Warwick University) for work on extending the role of the Dental Nurse in orthodontic practice; auditing and assuring quality of impressions and clinical photographs.

To finish the day we were treated to some new core CDP by Professor Mark McGurk who examined “Medical Risks in a complex world”. The first part concentrated on looking at and identifying lesions in and around the oral cavity and he also demonstrated that our inability to receive and full social and medical history from our patients is letting us and patients down. The simple act of ticking boxes has taken us away from really “drilling down” with our patients to examine those risk factors that we should really be paying attention to especially when our patients have a history of smoking, alcohol use and the history of very complex medical histories. He also highlighted the very new risks presented to us by new medical therapies that we as practitioners may not be paying enough attention too.

A thoroughly entertaining day which any team could have attended; you should perhaps consider it next year and I hope I get invited again.

About the author
Shaun trained and qualified in the Royal Army Dental Corps in 1993. He works in the NHS and privately full time in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. He sat on the GDC Fitness to Practise Panel from 2005-2008 at which time he became one of the first DCP Local Advisers in Dental Protection. He is currently the National Mentorship Leader for Philips Sonicare and is currently training in Mentorship to become part of their Transitional Support Programme. Shaun has a keen interest in Clinical Governance and is a FGDPU trained practice appraiser. He currently sits on the Editorial Board of DHRT and Dental Tribune and contributes to these off-line. He has spoken widely to groups all across the UK drawing on his experiences on GP and his work with Dental Protection.