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Trevor Burke



Steve Hawkins

A sorry failure

Observant readers will have noted the absence, in the past two issues, of the feature 'I learnt from dentistry from that'. This was started, in June 2019, as a result of a positive response from readers to an editorial in January 2019, by us,¹ in which we asked readers if they would be prepared to contribute to a feature in which dentists would recount positive and negative events from their professional lives. The notion was to mimic pilots' open reporting culture with a view to increasing safety. However, in the dental world, it appears that there is not a thirst for this concept, hence the absence of the feature. Dentists and pilots share a need to be good communicators, but it appears that dentists are shy regarding publicizing their failures and/or too modest to share their successes. The editor had planned to make this point by publishing a blank half page in this issue, but, to his surprise and joy, suitable material arrived on the *Dental Update* doorstep: hence no blank half page!

We have also, in various meetings/lectures around the country, sought to find out why dentists are so obviously reluctant to recount their (good and bad) experiences anonymously. The results of our questioning are, by no means, a scientific survey, but the overwhelming view could be summarized by one respondent – 'despite you promising that the publication would be anonymous, there must be ways of the Regulator finding out who has written a report describing one of their failures'. Others have echoed this comment, then adding that the General Dental Council (GDC) have gone as far as to employ private detectives in a much-publicized effort to entrap a dental technician. That

was indeed a shameful event, and it can be hoped that whoever authorized the spend of £17k of Registrants' money no longer works for the GDC.

Readers will have a chance to view another sorry tale involving the GDC in the current issue. The handling of that particular case appears suboptimal to say the least. That is sad, because there is no question that the GDC is trying to make positive changes in order to help reach a more balanced and fair system of regulation. No names will be mentioned, but some appointments to the Fitness to Practice side of the organization have given hope that improvements are indeed possible. However, there remains a need to support remediation with minor matters, and focus on the serious ones. Unfortunately, the organization does not always get its message across about the good things it is doing, because it seems to take one step forward and, at the same time, another back (the detectives): and we are all aware that bad publicity tends to make the headlines. Anxieties, or even paranoia, concerning the GDC therefore seem to have contributed to the paucity of material that dentists wish to share with the readers of *Dental Update* in the model of open reporting. That is a sorry failure and it is a sorry failure that the GDC have contributed to this.

Reference

1. Hawkins S, Burke FJT. 'I learnt about dentistry from that' – First steps in developing an open reporting culture in dentistry. *Dent Update* 2019; **46**: 5.

Postscript: I am happy to keep the feature alive, if more material arrives!