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Dental Update Subscriptions
 Mark Allen Group, Unit A 1-5, Dinton Business Park,
 Catherine Ford Road, Dinton, Salisbury SP3 5HZ
 FREEPHONE: 0800 137201
 Main telephone (inc. overseas): 01722 716997
 E: subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Managing Director: Stuart Thompson

Creative Manager: Lisa Dunbar

Design Creative: Charlotte Skinner

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GEORGE WARMAN PUBLICATIONS (UK) LTD
 Unit 2, Riverview Business Park, Walnut Tree Close,
 Guildford, Surrey GU1 4UX
 Tel: 01483 304944, Fax: 01483 303191
 email: astroud@georgewarman.co.uk
 website: www.dental-update.co.uk



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F J Trevor Burke

Fake CPD?

The term Fake News is a new one to most of us, having come to our attention during the recent US Presidential election. It is also referred to as hoax news, and is not to be confused with satire, because the Fake News strives to mislead, rather than to entertain. Some of the fake news during the 2016 US presidential election season was traced to adolescents in Macedonia, specifically Veles,¹ with the Mayor of this town not expressing any anxiety regarding this, as the actions of the Fake News writers was not, he said, against Macedonian law and their finances were taxable. Some of the fake news stories were flanked by reputable organizations, leading to one such company stating that the company was frustrated, also acknowledging the risk of using automated adverts. All of this is now the subject of a Parliamentary enquiry.

Readers of *Dental Update* will be aware that the Internet is not peer reviewed, which is why patients may attend our surgeries armed with incorrect or inappropriate information. All of these being good reasons why we should read peer-reviewed journals when we are searching for the answer to a clinical question. Those readers who have carried out a literature critical appraisal exercise at some time during their career will be aware that errors may creep into peer-reviewed journals but, notwithstanding this, the letters to the editor page in subsequent issues generally 'puts the facts straight', allowing readers to be made aware of the article's failings. Richard Simonsen pointed out another positive aspect of peer review, namely that it forces authors to listen to outsiders' comments, resulting in an improved publication.² Peer reviewing places a journal in a higher bracket of quality and clinical/scientific accuracy.

However, there is a cost associated with peer reviewing, so it is rare to find free publications which are peer reviewed. It was therefore with astonishment that I recently noticed an advertisement for a non-peer-reviewed, free magazine which was planning to offer Verifiable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to its readers. I could not work out how something which was not *verified* by peer review could then offer Verifiable CPD' (given that the *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines Verify: To prove to be true, to check or determine the correctness or truth...) ! It seemed counter-intuitive and bizarre in the extreme, a bit like offering CPD on Fake News.

There is an opportunity to put this right. The General Dental Council (GDC) have recently launched a major initiative, *Shifting the Balance*,³ which looks like it should go some way to restoring its image, as indeed recent contacts with and noises from the GDC have started to do. This initiative is to be welcomed, but it also gives UK Registrants the opportunity, by means of a consultation exercise, to voice their views on the future form that dental CPD in the UK should take. It seems unlikely that the GDC will have the manpower to vet all CPD, so a simpler method is needed. The document states 'we need to consider how to assure the quality of CPD'; adding 'guidance to positively incentivise the CPD provider to embed quality assurance methods in their courses/journals' (journal added by me!). For Verifiable CPD via a journal, it is my view that the GDC should recommend CPD from journals which have a peer review process in place: to me, this seems to be a good starting point in order to prevent fake CPD.

Post script: For all UK registrants, *Shifting the Balance* is well worth a read. The GDC is inviting comments on the future shape of UK CPD and the other issues raised in the document, the email address being shiftingthebalance@gdc-uk.org

References

1. Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news website
2. Simonsen RJ. Peer review – it should mean something. *Quintessence Int* 1996; **27**: 509.
3. General Dental Council. London, 2017. *Shifting the Balance*.