

SHINING A POSITIVE LIGHT ON DENTISTRY

Written by editor-in-chief **Ellis Paul**

As I have often said, the UK press seem to have an obsession with the dental profession and continually portray dentists in a negative light. Headlines featuring greedy dentists who take advantage of the public, are one of its most popular themes.

What never appears to get any publicity is the huge amount of good work dentists do for the public at large - but then this is not the sort of headline material in which the press is interested. However, in actual fact the dental profession is probably one of the most generous and caring ones of all.

To help illustrate this, I feel I should mention just three of the many such organisations who are great examples. One of the leaders in this field is The Dental Wellness Trust (DWT) it was founded in 2011 by that dental whirlwind Dr Linda Greenwall. It is a charity based in London whose mission is to improve oral health and dental wellbeing. This will be achieved through the provision of dental programmes to disadvantaged communities in both the UK and other selected areas in the world. There will also be pro-bono treatment programmes for those in need who cannot access the normal channels of healthcare.

The DWT works with established organisations and individuals, distributing toothbrushes and toothpaste to needy communities. Oral health educators and innovative online educational programmes developed by the Trust are used to teach correct brushing techniques and the importance of maintaining good oral health. But the Trust's activities are not just limited to



the UK. It does a tremendous amount in Africa. For example it funded a dentist and hygienist to travel to two orphanages in Rwanda. They screened 1,000 orphans to assess their dental needs and then presented oral hygiene lessons to the children. Not content with this, Linda herself travelled to South Africa to co-host a conference in Capetown to discuss oral health needs in the Western Cape, where caries is rampant. The Trust is also working in one of the largest townships - Khayelisha, where oral health is very poor. Children have been provided with toothbrushes, and 19 teachers and health workers have been trained as toothbrushing supervisors. Future plans are to build a dental clinic in the township with a major fundraising project shared between the UK and South Africa.

But of course there are many other dental organisations who do wonderful work. For example the British Academy of Restorative Dentistry (BARD), which was founded by another dynamo in Professor Paul Tipton. Though its stated aim is to strive for clinical excellence and continually develop skillsets. But it also aims to give back to those less fortunate

through its BARD Charitable Foundation. Its mission is to assist patients who have damaged teeth but have no funds for their restoration. It provides treatment at no cost to qualified patients through its network of volunteer restorative dentists, as well as a supporting team of laboratories and dental manufacturers.

Yet another altruistic organisation is the long-established British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (BACD). It too does a huge amount of work aimed at raising standards in cosmetic dentistry - and very successfully I may say. But it too is extremely charitable. The Academy's annual conference is one of the major events in the dental calendar and entails an enormous effort by its organising committee. Yet it donates the entire profit to charity.

So will all these wonderful organisations - not to mention the dozens like them in the profession - be given the same headlines and coverage as all those sensational stories about greedy dentists? I somehow think not! Maybe it is time for good by dentists to be more widely publicised in the national press - and it is up to us to present the true picture of dentistry.

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