

STUDENTS



DentaltownUK Honorary Associate Editor Kishan Sheth

Dear fellow colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen: I was deeply and truly honoured when I was appointed as the student honorary associate editor for the DentaltownUK publication, back in January 2017.

The entire concept of *Dentaltown* in the USA has empowered dentists all around the world and has been an extremely beneficial learning tool for students, including myself, and I was very excited to hear that the movement was being brought to the UK.

It is indeed a chance and an opportunity to discuss important matters and trends in dentistry and share ideas, which lead to the spreading of knowledge and generation of discussion and debate.

The primary goal of the student section is to empower undergraduate dental students to write about topics they are passionate about, and share their experiences with all their fellow dental students in the UK.

Is there an area within dentistry that you have been reading about? Would you like to put together a brief article summarizing your findings?

Have you read a book recently that you think has changed the way you view something? Would like to write up a book review?

Whatever empowers the profession and begins discussion should be shared for all to benefit from, and we all encourage the discussion of ideas which will help us

to raise our standards and become more effective providers of patient-centred, evidence-based, minimally invasive and holistic dentistry.

It has been exciting to witness the great explosion in discussion which *DentaltownUK* has sparked, and it has been empowering to see that students all around the UK have so much positive feedback, and that so many wish to get involved. In this edition we take a look at a day in the life of Dr Gerard Balague Viladrich, a King's College London Dental School clinical teacher and dentist.

We also take a closer look at dental anxiety amongst dental students by Keshana Kuru, BDS3 dental student at King's College London.

I must congratulate both the authors of these articles for doing such a fantastic job. I also write a short article on mastering your communication skills as a dental student.

I am confident that *DentaltownUK* will continue to deliver an unrivalled service to the profession, and will continuously play a pivotal role in the way in which students and professionals come together. Enjoy this edition of *DentaltownUK*!



We almost always associate dental anxiety with our patients who are terrified of the dentist, but we fail to recognise the daunting aspect of anxiety among dental professionals, or dental students.

Anxiety is suddenly such a big elephant in the room when it is associated with healthcare professionals, and none of us want to admit to it, or even talk about it. However, why is it that we are not reluctant to discuss this issue with our anxious patients?

It must be noted that dental anxiety faced by students should not only be merely attributed to the content of dentistry and its clinical practices, but it should be considered that the anxiety could be accounted for by the numerous emotional and psychological factors that students have to face.

It has been shown that anxiety is the most prevalent mental health issue that students tend to experience (Brown, 2016).

As a student in general, I found it difficult adjusting into my "new life". Our new "university lives", as it were. Making new friends who I could have a laugh with in times of solitude, balancing the avalanche of revision with my social life, and not to forget the whole "being an adult" thing.

It is quite overwhelming for a mere A-level student to transition between studying a set syllabus; learning skills that we may never end up using, to studying Dentistry, in which we learn skills not just



What Seems to Go Unnoticed: Dental Anxiety Among Dental Students

by Keshana Kuru,
BDS3 dental student at KCL

to pass an exam, but to incorporate them into our day-to-day lives.

A study done in Bulgaria by the Medical University of Plovdiv clearly exhibited the fact that first year dental students had much higher mean dental anxiety scores than older years (Kirova, 2011). This may be because of the whole adjustment period and the fact that older years have had extensive clinical experience than the new dental students. It also reinforces how dental anxiety incorporates much larger concepts than what just meets the eye, or what reaches the ear.

We are taught to be professional as dentists, and to leave our personal lives behind before entering our clinics. But I guess sometimes, there are certain things that cannot be simply repressed, and this can induce anxiety among students during dental procedures.

An anxious dental student may want to end their day as soon as possible, which can adversely affect their clinical performance, as dentistry requires precision and time. An anxious student may lose confidence in themselves whilst undergoing the procedure.

An anxious student may even start to show physical signs of fear such as having an unsteady hand, or clammy palms. All of this doesn't just affect the student's clinical performance, but also endangers the patient being treated. So why is dental anxiety in dental students still considered a taboo?

Sometimes stress can be helpful in

order to push us to do our best, but when we can't cope with the pressure, we start to crumble under it. A recent study in Saudi Arabia has shown us that students suffered higher levels of anxiety and stress if their exams were approaching.

It also showed that stress and anxiety levels are positively correlated, but the causative relationship is yet to be discovered. Nevertheless, it has been proven that dental anxiety among dental students can be reduced if education and awareness during dental procedures is enhanced.

If a student feels highly confident in what they are doing, then the effects of anxiety can be overcome for at least the duration of the procedure. However, this comes with acquired clinical experience and this is why older dental students tend to have lower levels of dental anxiety.

If anxiety is considered to be a "fear of nothing", then how can a student possibly manage to control their dental anxiety, especially if they are afraid to confront it? One way to minimise clinical anxiety could be to cultivate a supportive learning environment, in which the anxious student can master their skills as well as having a good support network to lean on in times of need.

However, the first step to dealing with anxiety among students is to accept that they suffer from it, and recognise that it needs to be dealt with. To some extent, denial allows a person to continue to function however, in the case of a dental student, this is not enough.

We can often think that we are physically functioning to an appropriate level, such as putting on a brave face, but in actual fact, we

are probably not psychologically functioning well enough to treat a patient to the best of our abilities.

We sometimes just tend to see things subjectively when it involves our own behaviours (Nichols, 2010). Occasionally, it is very useful to have another peer to talk to, especially because they understand the pressure we face.

Often dental anxiety can be eradicated in the presence of consolation from another dental student as it allows us to visualise reality, as opposed to being trapped by our own distorted cognitions.

One thing that is a major game changer is the fact that we are not the only ones. 4 out of every 10 university students have suffered from anxiety (Mistler et al. 2011) and it often helps to know that we are not alone; having anxiety does not mean you are "abnormal" from the rest of the population, it just means we worry more than others which is totally not abnormal. Eventually, we all will find our own personalised coping mechanisms as dental students... because we won't always get to be students!

References:

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