Publicity?

There’s no such thing as bad publicity (except your own obituary!)
Dominic Behan. My Brother Brendan (1963)

Dentistry gets its fair share of publicity, much of it, sadly, dentist bashing, so some UK television viewers may have joyfully watched the two part series on the BBC, The Truth about your Teeth. In this, watchers are treated to the calming and ultra-caring attitude of Dr Serpil Djemal, a Consultant at King’s College Hospital, London, who sets the most nervous patients at ease and seems to be able to get them (or at least the ones that we see) to accept the dental treatment, the thought of which has petrified them for years – all good publicity. One particular patient, Angie, was notable for her anxiety, resorting to superglue to glue in either a loose tooth or a post crown. Either way, it was obvious that this patient needed serious treatment, with extractions being the most obvious solution when we learned that she had lost 90% of bony support. We later learned that Angie had eleven extractions and six immediate implants and the result, once the swelling had subsided, looked great. I am certain that some readers of Dental Update will have had patients attending as a result of the programme, asking for a similar miracle. Still good publicity, until we have to tell our patients that the prognosis of implants is far from 100% at 5 years, indeed that results of a systematic review of the literature has indicated that 65% of implants (with their associated crowns) survive for 16 years,1 and that the prognosis is substantially poorer in patients who have had periodontal disease, even if it has been treated.2 In addition, no reader will be unaware that the prognosis of dental implants has been known for some time to be poorer in patients who smoke,3 as Angie did. So, when will this good publicity turn to bad? – potentially with the onset of peri-implantitis for the patient who (we were advised) spent all of her savings on her treatment, and how can we explain this to patients who ask us for this miracle cure?

There can be no question that The Truth about your Teeth will have helped public awareness of a variety of dental problems. I am also aware that viewers will only have seen a proportion of what was actually filmed, but it seems a shame that Professor Iain Chapple, another star of the show and a world class clinician and researcher in periodontology, was not asked about the implant case because, if he had been, he may have advised that ‘the best form of implant remains the natural tooth and removing teeth that are saveable in a functional state to replace with implants frequently ends in tears’. Still on the subject of publicity, the recently published Which Report on Dentistry, for which researchers are said to have visited 500 UK dental practices in March 2015, makes very uncomfortable reading, especially when it prompts a Daily Mail headline ‘Greedy dentists fleece families’ and an editorial which accuses dentists of extracting teeth unnecessarily to save time and money, ruthlessly exploiting people, often in pain, and finishing by calling this fraud. Who said that there is no such thing as bad publicity?

Finally, I am delighted that the Members and Fellows of the Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow (RCPsG) have again written a complete issue of Dental Update. This provides the usual varied fare which readers expect but, moreover, indicates what a wide and varied group their Faculty includes, from Restorative Dentistry to Oral Medicine and so forth (not just surgery!). In addition, the Guest Comment from the Dean of the Faculty gives readers the publicity that the range of qualifications from the College deserves, notwithstanding the superb new facilities and packages that are available. Thank you to the Faculty of Dental Surgery at RCPsG for writing for us.

References


All articles published in Dental Update are subject to review by specialist referees in the appropriate dental disciplines.