

NEW GENERATION NEW CHALLENGES



Watching the Olympic opening ceremony this summer, I was struck by the emphasis placed on passing the torch to a younger generation (literally, in this case). It set me thinking about my last editorial once again, which focused on the new generation of dental clinicians now coming through the educational system, and how important it is to secure a positive future not only for those professionals, but also for the oral health of the UK's population.

So, with 26.9 million people in the UK watching the Olympic opening ceremony, according to the BBC, and an estimated worldwide audience of over one billion, I think it's fair to say the value of investing in, and building on, the potential of younger generations is well and truly in the public domain.

With this in mind, I wondered what the future holds in terms of oral health in the UK, and where better to look for such an insight than the latest *Adult Dental Health Survey*? The report states: 'For those under 45, the likelihood of retaining not just some teeth, but a considerable number of healthy teeth through the whole of a long life, is now very high. In particular, the prospects for young adults aged 16 to 24 are better than ever.' This is great news but there is a caveat: 'Good oral health cannot be taken for granted, even in the young, and the variations with social class and, to a lesser extent, geography are very apparent.'

With people living longer, we need to work with our younger patients now to ensure their oral health does not let them down, and one area that urgently needs our attention is that of toothwear. The *Adult Dental Health Survey* states that:

- Over three quarters of dentate adults show some toothwear in their anterior teeth
- For adults under the age of 65, moderate and severe toothwear has increased since 1998
- The increase in moderate toothwear in 16 to 34-year olds is of clinical relevance, as it is suggestive of rapid toothwear.

It seems to me there is no doubt that toothwear is set to become an ever greater challenge in practice in the years to come. Increasingly abrasive diets and acidic beverages, eating disorders like bulimia and stress-related parafunction, as well as other factors such as drug abuse, all contribute to tooth wear. So keep your eyes peeled for any telltale signs, act without delay and make sure your patients understand that for their dental future to be bright, nothing short of a proactive team effort will secure the oral health of future generations.

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