

# DENTAL TRIBUNE

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## News in Brief

**Hygienist to walk 500 miles**  
Through Mouth Cancer Action Month 2014, Christina will be walking '500 miles for 500 smiles' from Scotland to Brighton and in doing so, raise awareness of mouth cancer. The campaign launched in Brighton on, and will mark the start of a remarkable journey for owner of Dental Health Spa Brighton and Dental Hygienist of the Year Christina. The walk will begin in Kirriemuir, Scotland, where Christina's career began, and conclude at her current practice in Brighton, passing through 52 destinations. The money raised will go towards Mouth Cancer Action Month. For further information about the campaign, visit [www.500miles4smiles.org](http://www.500miles4smiles.org)

## Dental nursing award

Joan Hatchard, a dental nurse for over 30 years, has been awarded the 2013 Outstanding Contribution to Dental Nursing Award by the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN). The award was presented by outgoing BADN President, Nicola Docherty, at the National Dental Nursing Conference at the NEC in Birmingham. Joan gained her initial dental nursing qualification in 1988, then gained additional ones in Dental Sedation Nursing, Dental Radiography and Oral Health Education. In 1989 she began teaching dental nurses, and became a fully qualified Further Education teacher. As well as teaching, she is an examiner for the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses for both the NEBDN Diploma and Oral Health Education qualifications.

## Magnetic fields could help smokers quit

Magnetic fields that alter brain activity may help people quit smoking, according to a study. The study, carried out by a team of researchers at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, was presented at the Neuroscience 2013 conference in San Diego. The researchers used transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) to 'undo' nicotine addiction in the brain. Magnetic fields at two regions of the brain associated with addiction to nicotine – the prefrontal cortex and the insula cortex – were targeted. Participants in the study were split into three groups – those getting high-frequency TMS, low-frequency TMS or no treatment at all. The smokers in the study who were given high-frequency TMS were found to have lower levels of smoking and were more likely to quit at the end of the six-month study.

[www.dental-tribune.co.uk](http://www.dental-tribune.co.uk)

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More 'openness' for health system

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Transforming lives with straighter teeth

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# Mouth cancer is 'most frightening' cancer

November is Mouth Cancer Action Month, a campaign organised by the British Dental Health Foundation (BDHF) that aims to raise awareness of the risks and symptoms of the disease

Dental practices across the UK are being encouraged to check patients for signs of mouth cancer and make people aware of the four main risk factors for the disease: smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, poor diet and the human papillomavirus (HPV) often transmitted through oral sex.

The importance of the campaign is shown through latest figures which show that more than half of us are more frightened of developing mouth cancer (50.3 per cent) than other cancers.

The research, conducted on behalf of the British Dental Health Foundation and Denplan, also found that 75 per cent don't think they're at risk from mouth cancer.

It is estimated that around 60,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with mouth cancer in the next decade. Without early detection, an estimated 30,000 will die.

Henry Clover, Deputy Chief Dental Officer from Denplan, said: "Given that more than half of people we asked said mouth cancer was more frightening than other cancers, I would hope this concern translates into action.

"Mouth cancer can severely affect some of the very things we take for granted. Speaking, eating, drinking and breathing can all be affected by radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery resulting from the disease.

"Throughout the campaign we urge everyone to take action and visit their dentist. They are in the best position to check your mouth thoroughly for signs and symptoms of the disease."

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the BDHF, said: "Tobacco use and drinking alcohol to excess can increase the risk of developing mouth cancer by up to 50 times. Experts forecast the human papillomavirus (HPV) will over-

*'It is estimated that around 60,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with mouth cancer in the next decade'*

take smoking as the principle cause of the disease within the next ten years, and almost half of all cases in the UK have been linked to poor diet.

"The campaign is a great opportunity for the public to learn about the risks and what to look out for. Ulcers that do not heal within three weeks, red and white patches and unusual lumps or swellings in

the mouth should not be ignored. Our advice is clear – if in doubt, get checked out."

Turn to page six for more information about Mouth Cancer Action Month. [DT](#)

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# 'Beckoning' immune cells may treat gum disease



Periodontal disease could be effectively treated by 'beckoning' the right kind of immune system cells to the inflamed tissues, accord-

ing to researchers at the University of Pittsburgh.

"Currently, we try to control the build-up of bacteria so it doesn't trigger severe inflammation, which could eventually damage the bone and tissue that hold the teeth in place," said Charles Sfeir, co-author of the study.

"But that strategy doesn't address the real cause of the problem, which is an overre-

action of the immune system that causes a needlessly aggressive response to the presence of oral bacteria. There is a real need to design new approaches to treat periodontal disease."

"There is a lot of evidence now that shows these diseased tissues are deficient in a subset of immune cells called regulatory T-cells, which tells attacking immune cells to stand down, stopping the inflamma-

tory response," said Steven Little, senior author of the study. "We wanted to see what would happen if we brought these regulatory T-cells back to the gums."

The researchers developed a system of polymer microspheres to slowly release a signalling protein called CCL22 that attracts regulatory T-cells, and placed tiny amounts of the paste-like agent between the gums and teeth of animals

with periodontal disease.

The team found that even though the amount of bacteria was unchanged, the treatment led to improvements of standard measures of periodontal disease, including decreased pocket depth and gum bleeding, reflecting a reduction in inflammation as a result of increased numbers of regulatory T-cells. MicroCT-scanning showed lower rates of bone loss. [DT](#)

## CLP patients have higher caries prevalence



Researchers set out to reevaluate caries prevalence in non-syndromic patients with cleft lip and/or palate (CLP) in comparison with a matched non-CLP

population.

The researchers from The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto conducted a literature search in order to identify ar-

ticles reporting on the prevalence of caries in CLP versus non-CLP individuals.

Seven studies were used in the review, and involved a total of 474 CLP patients aged 1.5-29 years. When looking at permanent teeth, data from five of the studies suggest that CLP patients have a higher number of decayed, missing and filled (DMF) teeth than the controls, and for deciduous teeth, data from four of the studies suggest that CLP patients have a higher number of DMF teeth than the controls.

The researchers conclude that non-syndromic patients with CLP tend to have higher caries prevalence, both in the permanent and the deciduous dentition, in comparison with matched non-CLP controls. [DT](#)

## Unregistered dental therapist prosecuted



A dental therapist has been prosecuted for the illegal practice of dentistry.

Jane Penrose was registered with the General Dental Council (GDC) as a dental therapist from 1 October 1998 to 6 August 2012, when she was removed from the register for not paying her Annual Retention Fee.

On 2 September 2013, the GDC received a complaint that

Ms Penrose was still practising, despite being removed from the register. It was alleged that she had provided her employer with forged copies of her certificate of registration and indemnity insurance certificate.

Ms Penrose was arrested by South Yorkshire Police on 15 October 2013 and admitted to the offences, as well as admitting to treating more than 3,500 patients during the period that she was not registered.

On 1 November 2013 she appeared at Barnsley Magistrates' Court and pleaded guilty. She was sentenced to a 12 month conditional discharge and ordered to pay a £15 victim surcharge. [DT](#)

## Tobacco-purchasing age raised to 21 in NY

New York City Council has approved a measure that will raise the tobacco-purchasing age to 21.

The current purchasing age is 18 but the new bill will see make it illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to buy cigarettes, certain tobacco products and even electronic

cigarettes. The council also approved another bill that will set a minimum price of \$10.50 for a pack of cigarettes.

"This will literally save many, many lives," said City Councilman James Gennaro, whose mother and father died from tobacco-related diseases.

New York is the biggest city

in the US to ban cigarette sale to 19- and 20-year olds. Similar legislation is expected to come to a vote in Hawaii in December 2013, and the state of New Jersey is also considering a similar proposal.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has 30 days to sign the bills into law. The minimum age bill will then take effect 180 days after enactment.

"We know that tobacco dependence can begin very soon after a young person first tries smoking so it's critical that we stop young people from smoking before they even start," said Bloomberg. [DT](#)

## 'More openness and transparency' for NHS

NHS England will announce new measures that it says will increase public participation as part of its pledge to openness and transparency.

The new commitments include publishing more clinician level data, publishing more overarching clinical indicators, linking data from GP practices to data from all hospitals, and extending the 'Friends and Family Test' (a programme that asks patients whether they would recommend hospital services) to cover GP practices.

National Director for Patients and Information, said: "This is the single most important step forward in transparency for healthcare anywhere in the world.

"The English healthcare system is already one of the most transparent in the world – publishing more information than any other country. But these new measures will transform outcomes, put citizens at the centre of everything we do and will provide the means by which NHS England will be at the cutting edge of medical science." [DT](#)

These new measures come as the Prime Minister calls for more transparent government. David Cameron will address the 60 nations represented at the Open Government Partnership (held in London on 31 Oct 2013) and raise this issue.

Tim Kelsey, NHS England's



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## Editorial comment

“Welcome to November’s issue of *Dental Tribune*.”

Well, unless you actually don’t leave your practice, you cannot help but notice that No-

### Recession affects food purchases in UK

People in the UK are purchasing less calories and less fruit and vegetables, according to research. Published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the research was presented as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science on 4 November 2013.

“*Gluttony in England? Long-term change in diet*” describes changes in households’ calorie purchases since 1980. It shows that although the average weight of an adult male has increased by 9.6 kilograms, and the weight of an adult female by 7.9 kilograms, there has been a substantial reduction in calories purchased.

Calories purchased from eating out, soft drinks, snacks and confectionery increased over the period for all but young single households with particularly big increases for older single households (70 per cent) and couples with children (36 per cent). However, most calories are bought for consumption in the home, and the decline in calories from food at home was much larger than the increase in calories from eating out, soft drinks, snacks and confectionery.

Melanie Lührmann, one of the authors of the report said: “We were surprised to find that there has been a substantial decline in total calories purchased at a time when obesity has increased.

“Purchases of snack foods, soft drinks and food out have increased, and now account for a greater share of calories for most households. However, calories purchased for consumption at home have declined strongly and account for the bulk of households’ foods purchases. This does not mean that poor diet plays no part in rising obesity. But understanding the interaction between diet and physical activity is clearly crucial.”

A second report which looked at food expenditure and nutritional quality over the recession (from 2005 to 2012). It found that the average real food spending fell by 8.5 per cent from 2005-7 to 2010-12, as food spending in cash terms failed to keep up with rising food prices. From 2007 to 2012 the price of food rose by 10.2 per cent more than the price of all goods. <sup>DT</sup>

vember is Mouth Cancer Action Month (MCAM).

The campaign, organised by the British Dental Health Foundation and promoted throughout the UK, aims to raise awareness and encourage attendance to dental practices for screenings for a condition that can so horribly impact on a sufferer’s quality of life.

Detection at an early stage is critical so it MCAM is a timely reminder to both the public and healthcare professionals that ‘if in doubt, get checked out’.

Awareness event and screening sessions are being held all over the country – if you are a practice getting involved, let us know!

Take a look at pages 6-7 for more on the campaign, or go to the dedicated website – [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org).

Lest we forget, November is also Movember, a campaign for dubious facial hair to be grown to raise awareness of men’s health issues and in particular prostate cancer. If you are a ‘Mo Bro’ this year, I would love to have a picture so we can find the dodgiest Mo in dentistry!! Pictures to [lisa@healthcare-learning.com](mailto:lisa@healthcare-learning.com)

Until next month...<sup>DT</sup>

Do you have an opinion or something to say on any Dental Tribune UK article? Or would you like to write your own opinion for our guest comment page?

If so don’t hesitate to write to: The Editor, Dental Tribune UK Ltd, 4th Floor, Treasure House, 19-21 Hatton Garden, London, EC1 8BA

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## Consider your colleagues in need this Christmas



While Christmas can be a very joyous occasion, for some it can bring a period of struggle. For dentists who have found

themselves in serious financial crisis, this time of year can sometimes mean deciding whether you can afford to heat your home and feed your family, rather than how you are going to celebrate over the festive season.

At this crucial time of year many dentists turn to the BDA

Benevolent Fund for help.

Dr Ann Rockey, Chairman of the Fund, says: "Please consider your colleagues in need this Christmas? We all know what an expensive time of year it is with increased fuel bills, the ever-increasing costs of a supermarket shop, Christmas and the GDC Annual Retention Fee on top. Every year we have requests for

assistance from dentists in need. In recent years there has been a threefold increase in the number of applicants who are in difficulties with their commissioning bodies or the GDC".

Vital funds have already been raised by 80 dentists and their partners who took to the dance floor and raised £2,485 for the Fund. Organised by

Dr Ann Rockey and Dr Pam Norman, South Wales Trustee for the Board of Trustees of the Fund, the dinner dance was held at the Cardiff Village Hotel in April.

For more information, call 020 7486 44994, email [administrator@dentistshelp.org](mailto:administrator@dentistshelp.org) or visit [www.bdabenevolentfund.org.uk](http://www.bdabenevolentfund.org.uk)

## Fizzy drinks tax could reduce obesity by 180,000



Taxing fizzy drinks call

A 20 per cent tax on sugary drinks could reduce the number of obese adults in the UK by 180,000.

Researchers from the University of Oxford and University of Reading carried out the study, which is published in the *British Medical Journal*. It was found that the tax could also raise more than £275 million for the Treasury.

Sugary drinks (fizzy drinks, squashes and cordials) have been shown to increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and tooth decay. They only suppress appetite weakly, so consuming fewer sugary

drinks is unlikely to result in an increased intake of other sources of calories.

For the study, the researchers used a large survey of shopping preferences of families in the UK to estimate how purchases of sugary drinks would change in response to a 20 per cent increase in their price.

The research suggests that purchases of sugary drinks would reduce by around 15 per cent, with the expected

reduction in energy intake being 28 calories per person per week. This would reduce the number of obese adults by 180,000 in the UK, it was estimated.

Dr Adam Briggs from Oxford University and joint first author of the study, says: "Sugar sweetened drinks are known to be bad for health and our research indicates that a 20 per cent tax could result in a meaningful reduction in the number of obese adults in the UK."

Professor Richard Tiffin of the University of Reading says: "Obesity is a ticking time bomb. Doing nothing risks condemning millions of people to poor health and an early grave. This is a complex battle in which a soft drinks tax could be a useful weapon, but on its own would not go far enough in the face of such a massive problem. Sedentary lifestyles, poor education, addiction to alcohol and tobacco, and poverty all play far more significant roles than fizzy drinks in causing bad health."

## NHS Direct to close down



NHS Direct will be closed down in England next year following financial difficulty after winning a number of contracts for the 111 phone line.

The NHS Direct service ran from the late 1990s until April this year, when the 111 service was launched. The 111 service was split into 46 different contracts and NHS Direct won 11 of them. However, due to lower payment per call compared to when it ran the old 0845 number and lower call volumes than expected, NHS Direct lost £2.8m from April to June and was heading for a deficit of £26m if it continued until March.

NHS Direct also runs a

number of other services, including an information website, GP appointments booking phone line and complaints service. Many of these are expected to be transferred to other parts of the health service.

NHS England has overseen arrangements to transfer 111 services currently provided by NHS Direct to a range of providers, predominantly ambulance trusts.

The NHS Direct group in Wales is unaffected.

## Stoptober challenge reaches new high

This year saw the largest amount of people taking part in Stoptober, the mass 28-day stop smoking challenge.

Nearly quarter of a million people in England and Wales took part in the campaign and gave up smoking.

Research shows that stopping smoking for 28 days can extend your life by up to one week if you remain smoke-free. If those who gave up quit for good, they could collectively add as much as 4,700

years of life to the population.

The benefits aren't only health-related; there are major savings in time and money too. The average smoker has 15 cigarettes a day. Stoptober would have saved them £141 each over four weeks, and if they remain smoke-free, they could save £1,696 in a year. Plus, the average cigarette takes approximately four minutes to smoke, so this Stoptober could have saved the average smoker over 24 hours by not smoking.

## Simon Stevens appointed new NHS boss



Pictured: Simon Stevens. Image source: AP

Simon Stevens, a senior executive at a private US health firm, has been ap-

pointed to lead NHS England.

Simon will take over from

Sir David Nicholson on 1 April 2014. He has worked as an NHS manager, a health adviser to Labour, and is currently working for United Healthcare as its global health president.

Chairman Professor Sir Malcolm Grant said: "I am delighted that Simon will be taking on this exceptionally challenging leadership role for the NHS. He has huge experience, both national and global, and across all sectors, and is admired by healthcare professionals across the world for his commitment to the values of the NHS and to the provision of quality healthcare for all.

"He brings a wealth of ideas and unique experience, building on a distinguished career across the NHS, international healthcare and government. I look forward to working closely with him as we lead innovation, change and significant improvement in safety and quality to patients across all areas of the NHS.

"We have been through a rigorous global search, and engaged with a range of excellent candidates. I am confident that Simon Stevens is the right person to lead NHS England through the coming years, bringing new ideas and fresh energy."

Simon Stevens said: "The next five years are going to be extremely challenging for the NHS, but compassionate high quality for all is as vital as ever. It will be a privilege to lead NHS England – at a time when the stakes have never been higher – because I believe in the NHS, and because I believe that a broad new partnership of patients, carers, staff and the public can together chart a successful future for our Health Service."



# Dental Nurse Education Zone

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# November is...Mouth Cancer Action Month

This November healthcare professionals and dental practices all over the country are raising awareness of mouth cancer. *Dental Tribune* looks at the issues behind the campaign

### What is HPV?



- Infect the skin and the lining of the cervix, vagina, anus, mouth and throat
- Very large family of viruses

basically 2 groups

- > low risk types causing laryngeal and genital warts  
HPV 6,11
- > high risk types causing cancer  
13 cancer types  
HPV 16 - most important

### Human papillomavirus and rising oropharyngeal cancer incidence in the United States.

	1984-1989	16.3%	2000-2004	71.7%
HPV+ve cancers	1988	0.8/100,000	2004	2.6/100,000
HPV-ve cancers	1988	2.0/100,000	2004	1.0/100,000

50% decline

**"If recent incidence trends continue, the annual number of HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers is expected to surpass the annual number of cervical cancers by the year 2020"**

Chaturvedi et al 2011 J Clin Oncol 29:4294

Slides depicting rise of HPV in Oral Cancer rates. Taken from Prof Stanley's presentation at the launch of Mouth Cancer Action Month, October 2013

**M**outh Cancer Action Month, organised by the British Dental Health Foundation, is an annual campaign aiming to raise awareness and screening for oral cancer in the UK population.

Sponsored by Denplan and also supported by Dentists' Provident and the Association of Dental Groups (ADG), The BDHF uses the campaign to call on dentists, doctors and pharmacists to educate members of the general public about a disease that kills more people in the UK than testicular and cervical cancer combined, under the tagline 'If in doubt, get checked out'.

Latest figures show more than 6,500<sup>1</sup> new cases a year are diagnosed in the UK, with one person dying every five hours from the disease. As a result, action really must be

taken to raise awareness and change these figures. Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter OBE, highlights the importance of early detection in the battle against the disease.

Dr Carter said: "If the profession can inform and urge patients that regularly attending check-ups increases the chances of mouth cancer being detected at an early stage, together we can help to raise awareness of this killer disease.

"Almost nine in ten people survive mouth cancer if it is caught early, yet the five year survival rate remains as low as 50 per cent. Encouraging patients to perform self-diagnosis such as looking for ulcers that do not heal within three weeks, red or white patches in the mouth and any

unusual lumps or swelling can also help towards early detection."

#### Risks

Lifestyle choices heavily influence the risk of developing mouth cancer. Tobacco use, drinking alcohol to ex-

plugged. Smoking and drinking to excess increase your chances of getting mouth cancer by 30 times as much, yet so many social smokers often light up while having a drink.

"Of greater concern is the

*"It is not fair, ethical or socially responsible to have a public health policy that leaves half of the population vulnerable to infection"*

cess, poor diet and the human papillomavirus (HPV), often transmitted via oral sex, increase the chances of mouth cancer. Dr Carter added: "The scale of increasing mouth cancer rates is very worrying. There is a clear gap in public knowledge about what causes mouth cancer that needs to be

rise of the human papillomavirus (HPV). It is forecast to overtake smoking as the leading cause of the disease in the next ten years. Poor diet has been linked to half of cases in the UK. All of these factors make early diagnosis so important. If it is caught early, the chances of surviv-

ing mouth cancer are 90 per cent. If it is caught late, which unfortunately many cases are, then there is a 50/50 chance of living."

#### Jabs for the boys

In a survey conducted by One-Poll<sup>2</sup>, three times as many people said they would support giving the HPV jab to boys than were opposed to it. The poll also showed the public's lack of knowledge when it comes to the virus, with more than one in five men (21 per cent) under the impression HPV can be transmitted like a common cold.

Currently in the UK all girls aged 12-13 are offered the HPV vaccine, given in three injection over the course of a year.

Experts have forecast that the human papillomavirus (HPV), often transmitted via oral sex, will overtake tobacco use as the main risk factor for mouth cancer within the next decade. Despite the high profile case involving Michael Douglas, mouth cancer campaigners the British Dental Health Foundation remain concerned at the lack of awareness about the virus.

Professor Margaret Stanley OBE from the Department of Pathology University of Cambridge, who was the keynote speaker at this year's Mouth Cancer Action Month Parliamentary Reception in October, strongly voiced her support for men receiving the HPV vaccine. "The burden of HPV



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associated cancers is now almost the same in men as in women. Men face a significant and rising risk of HPV-associated disease, and without vaccination men remain at risk.

“It is not fair, ethical or socially responsible to have a public health policy that leaves half of the population vulnerable to infection. This is why men should get the HPV vaccine immediately.”

Dr Carter supported Professor Stanley’s call for giving boys the jab: “The HPV vaccination of young men has already started in Australia and the British Dental Health Foundation is calling for the same to happen in the UK. A wealth of evidence and opinion in the USA suggests a population-wide HPV vaccination programme is now the best solution – for general public health and financial reasons. It is a debate that needs to be opened again here in the UK, as part of the on-going debate about the health and well-being of young people.

“In the UK around one in five cases of oral cancer are predicted to be as a result of HPV, yet our awareness and

snoring and even high blood pressure.

Dr Carter said: “For no-one to be able to correctly identify what the four causes of the disease are is both surprising and worrying. The campaign continues to play a crucial role in educating the public about the disease, and it’s clear from the survey we still have some way to go.

“The campaign is a great

opportunity for the public to learn about the risks and what to look out for. Ulcers that do not heal within three weeks, red and white patches and unusual lumps or swellings in the mouth should not be ignored. Our advice is clear – if in doubt, get checked out.”

Mouth Cancer Action Month runs throughout November. For more information, visit [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org)

References

1. <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/types/oral/?script=true>
2. Research conducted on behalf of the British Dental Health Foundation by

OnePoll, September 2013. Sample size: 2,00



*‘Our advice is clear – if in doubt, get checked out’*

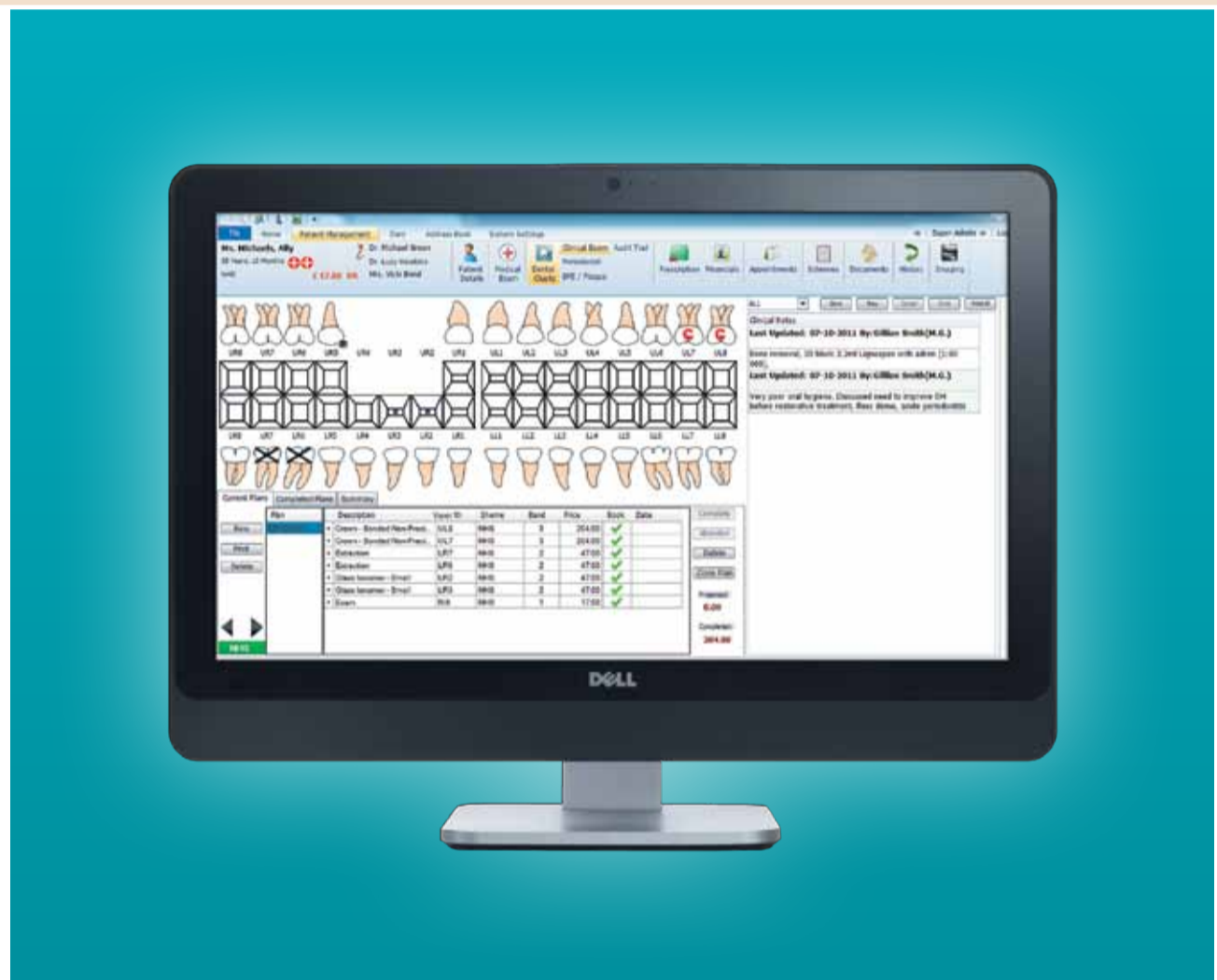
understanding of the virus is alarmingly low. Cases of mouth cancer have doubled in the last 50 years, coinciding with the rise of HPV, and strengthen the argument that there is not enough awareness of the risks we take when we have unprotected sex.”

Long way to go

Despite the success of previous campaigns, a recent survey shows that there is much more still to do to establish the signs and symptoms of mouth cancer in the public mindset.

The survey<sup>2</sup> asked more than 2,000 people if they could name the four main risk factors for mouth cancer, with no-one able to identify the quartet of smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, poor diet and, despite Michael Douglas’ high profile case, HPV.

Worryingly, a large number of people mistakenly thought bad oral health was responsible for the disease while other answers included stress, smog, anaemia,



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# The importance of clean water lines

Jane Armitage urges readers to be aware of clean water lines

The cleaning of water lines is something I would not normally write about but this is going to be a personal article that I would like to raise

awareness to. Last year I received a telephone call from a chest consultant who told me that he thought he knew why I was having recurrent chest infections, tiredness, and persistent cough.

He had taken three sputum samples from me and had grown Mycobacterium avium and Mycobacterium intracellulare, otherwise known as a Mycobacterium avium-intracellulare infection

(MAI) or MAC (Mycobacterium avium Complex). These bacteria are found living in house dust and tap water. They may infect wild or domestic animals as well as humans.

I had never heard of it and was very self composed when he told me it was a type of lung infection caused by bacteria from the same genus as the one which causes Tuberculosis (Tb), but was non-contagious. Within a matter of days I was seen by a Tb specialist and commenced treatment the following day.

I was told that MAC mimics Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MTB) and is usually found in thin middle age women with low immunity. He stated that he wished I had had full-blown infectious Tb as this would have been cleared in six months. Unlike Tb, it would take a treatment plan of 18 – 24 months (three times as long as conventional Tb) and relapses are common even after taking what was described as chemotherapy antibiotics. I was ok until I saw that word then I freaked. How can this have happened? How had I caught it? Was I going to die? These were all questions I was throwing at him.

He explained that this form of non-contagious mycobacterial infection can be caught from shower heads, soil, cigarette papers, any form of sprayed water

*'I remember looking at the medication and putting it back in the bag as the mere thought was freaking me out'*

or simply by breathing the bug in. I was told I had been unlucky and his guess was I had breathed it in and slowly it had reached my lung and started to attack. The bug was already in the white blood cells which are responsible for removing infections in the body therefore it was difficult to get rid of.

MAC is resistant to many antibiotics; there are limited drugs that can be given but all come with extreme side effects which I was warned about. One drug can affect the optical nerve in the eye, the other, your liver. I remember looking at the medication and putting it back in the bag as the mere thought was freaking me out.



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