

BSPD President, Mrs Jenny Harris

Valedictory Address

14 September 2023

A year ago, I stood before you as the Society's incoming President in the magnificent surroundings of Sheffield's Cutlers' Hall at a very sombre time in history. If you were there, you will remember that our country was paused for National Mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Yet, in sharp contrast, we were thrilled to be meeting in person for the first full scientific conference since the pandemic.

We did not then know that 2022 would turn out to be a year of three Prime Ministers, that train strikes would continue and continue, nor did we predict that by now both junior doctors and consultants would be taking industrial action to reverse declines in pay. What we did know was that we were already seeing widening health inequalities, long waits for dental treatment and a cost-of-living crisis, all of which have had the greatest impact on our most vulnerable patients.

In the face of these challenges in society and in our 'day jobs', it is remarkable that BSPD has had such a productive year. At the Council meeting yesterday, it was my pleasure and privilege to present a three-yearly review of BSPD activity 2020-23, on behalf of our recent past presidents, Mrs Sarah McKaig and Professor Sondas Albadri and myself. The review document maps the actions that BSPD has collectively taken across the seven domains of the Society's Mission Statement and Strategy.

For my part, I made two specific commitments this time last year. The first was to lead BSPD in a focus on children's rights, the second to see publication of an update to BSPD's policy document on dental neglect.

To this end we arranged a children's rights training workshop with UNICEF UK for those in BSPD's key leadership roles. Our learning about a children's rights-based approach fed into revising and updating our three-year Strategy for 2023-26.

And we now have plans to involve children in producing a children and young people's version of the same.

I have toured our regional branches, both virtually and in person, discussing with you the impact of children's rights on clinical dentistry – exploring in particular children's rights to the best possible healthcare, to information they can understand and to protection from harm. It has been a pleasure to meet with branches and to see your thirst for new ideas to improve dental care, especially in relation to accessible communication for children with disabilities.

It has been particularly satisfying to work in partnership with two highly-respected organisations, UNICEF UK and the NSPCC, securing their endorsement for our children's rights factsheet. In collaboration with the British Dental Association this was widely circulated both in print and digitally and has received the interest and support of many dental care professional organisations. My hope is that all BSPD members might now take up the baton and carry an awareness of children's rights into all that we do, whether that is in our clinical, teaching or leadership roles.

Regarding the updated BSPD policy document on dental neglect, I am pleased to report that we approved the proofs at the end of last week and can expect publication very soon in our own esteemed journal. Special thanks go to Lucy Ridsdale for leading the review and coordinating the focus group and consultation process.

Importantly, alongside these one-off projects, the Society has continued its *routine* work: that which happens year in, year out. At its backbone is the work of our regional branches in supporting and educating both members and the wider dental community, our non-regional branches - the Teachers' and Specialists', and our affiliated groups - the Consultants and Trainees Groups. Our numerous representatives at external committees have continued to speak up for children and paediatric dentistry and to feed back to us. Thank you to so many of you who have been involved in this work. It is only by working together as a Society that earns us a seat at the table in so many settings.

In addition to our routine work, the Society has been *responsive* to events in the news, to changing circumstances and to serendipitous invitations. Notably this

year we have written to MPs about children's oral health and we gave our support to a coalition of children's organisations campaigning for *Free School Meals For All*. One of the unexpected highlights of my Presidential year was standing outside Downing Street and then marching on Parliament Square chanting, "Rishi, Rishi, what's for lunch? We're in a cost-of-living crunch"!

Further from home it was my privilege to represent you at an International Association of Paediatric Dentistry (IAPD) Global Summit in Rome last November and, early this summer, to progress discussions with the American Academy of Paediatric Dentistry (AAPD) in the US.

Now to some all-important thankyou's. At the centre of all we do is our Administrator. Neil, I have always trusted your sound judgement, thank you. Next our hard-working media team: BSPD's ambitions would be much smaller and actions far less visible without you. I personally have particularly enjoyed the creative aspects of our work together on the children's rights factsheet and new prevention infographic and I am very grateful to you for your skill in relaying our requirements to our talented graphic designer, Matt Whitehead.

Thank you to every member of our Executive team. You have all brought different and valued perspectives. One of our greatest strengths has been that while we are often of one mind, we have also been able to discuss differing views and on the occasions when we have disagreed, we have done so agreeably. Thank you for the atmosphere of mutual respect that has enabled this; I feel honoured to have worked with each one of you. Deserving of special mention is Oosh Devalia who has worked tirelessly this year to finish updating a number of lengthy but undoubtedly absolutely essential documents.

So, I come to my final task, to hand over to my successor, Professor Paula Waterhouse. After hearing you speak at last year's Teachers' Study Day, Paula, and having appreciated your support and involvement over the past year, I am excited that you will be leading us in the year ahead. Can I invite you now to come up and accept the BSPD Presidential Medal.