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A vision for child's first 1001 days, without teeth?

The Early Years Healthy Development Review led by Andrea Leadsom ⁽¹⁾ provides a vision for the first critical 1001 days of a child's life in its newly published report. The omission of oral health from The Best Start for Life has been condemned by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry.

Commissioned by Boris Johnson to improve the health and development outcomes for babies in England, there is scant mention of the mouth or of dentistry.

"This is a report which appears to deny the importance of oral health to the health and well-being of the nation's children," says Claire Stevens CBE, our spokesperson. "It's hugely frustrating that the contribution of paediatric dentists has not been sought despite an offer to pull together an expert group, making this a missed opportunity."

She said the word dentist is used once: "With childhood dental extractions under general anaesthetic being the most common reason for a child to be admitted to hospital, this omission is breath-taking. The report is 147 pages, yet there is sadly not a single mention of children's oral health."

Dr Stevens continued: "I am urging Andrea Leadsom and the Government to take up our offer and engage with paediatric dentists so that in the coming months, the oral health needs of children can be factored into the vision for a child's first 1001 days."

"Our data show that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate effect on young children and those from a lower socio-economic groups and waiting lists for general anaesthetics are unacceptably long. As such, it's imperative that oral health is included in the context of general health. Every child deserves a smile for life."

BSPD has been urging Government to ensure that oral health is included in the review. A Dental Check by the Age of One, for instance, gets children into the routine of seeing a dentist and gives parents access to all-important oral health and dietary advice.

Dr Stevens continued: “While the pandemic was a barrier to routine dental visits, as we return to some semblance of normality, we need to be encouraging parents to engage with dentistry and caring for their children’s teeth. We know that dental disease is nearly always preventable.”

The mouth is factored into the report under the heading of infant feeding with a brief reference to tongue-tie. Mrs Stevens said: “We welcome the inclusion of tongue-tie. That any baby should be struggling to breastfeed due to tongue-tie is worrying. What we would like to see is a mouth check included as routine in the newborn check on every baby before they leave hospital so tongue-tie can be picked up early.

⁽¹⁾https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973112/The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf

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