The British Society of Periodontology’s annual conference took place at The Wellcome Collection, Euston and Kings Place, Kings Cross in London at the end of a very warm June 2017. Thankful for air conditioning, the 250 delegates, 13 exhibitors, 5 sponsors, 17 speakers, 4 conference chairs and 6 organisers all congregated for 3 days to attend an interesting and varied program of events orchestrated by this year’s BSP president, Professor Ian Needleman.

“When I put together the plan for the conference I was very excited. In sporting terms, it was like putting together my own fantasy league. However, I was also weighed by a huge sense of responsibility – making sure the program was cohesive and inspiring for delegates. I also introduced three new initiatives: the Patient Forum, a leadership and development programme for the Early Career Group and a clear social media strategy”. It would appear that the balance was just right as Professor Needleman mixed a range of personal development subjects with clinical developments and issues – all on the theme of performance and in pursuit of being the best you can be.

Over three days, world-class speakers presented on a variety of subjects that dove-tailed beautifully on the overall theme. The itinerary delivered on many levels. Each day began with inspirational, sports-themed presentations, followed by clinical lectures with lively debate, punctuated by breakout sessions on leadership, mindfulness and social media. Delegates were captivated by early sessions delivered by Baroness Tanni Grey Thompson DBE and Dr Dan Martin OBE, both of whom related the concept of performance and personal achievement to the world of periodontology – no mean feat, but very well done!

Behaviour change was a key theme of the conference and this was reflected in both the personal development and clinical lectures. Changing behaviour is an important part of improvement and so it was fascinating to hear the presenters weave this into their presentations, using personal experiences through anecdotes to illustrate their points. Ideas and strategies for stopping smoking by Robert West and how to successfully implement behaviour change by Susan Michie were both very well received by delegates. Birgitta Jonson discussed changing practitioner behaviour in order to facilitate patient behaviour change - where person centred care influences health behaviour change. This session was expertly chaired by Julian Ekiert, one of the forum members. A lunchtime session covered the lesser-known art of mindfulness where Sud Ubayasiri helped delegates learn the value of meditation to reduce anxiety and stress.

A progression of the theme of performance and change within periodontology was the inclusion of a digital focus within the program. Two of the speakers discussed the different ways technology is making an impact within dentistry. German Galucci and Maneesh Juneja both making this the topic of their presentations. A more relaxed lunchtime session by Ian Dunn highlighted the need for dental professionals to embrace social media within the parameters of the GDC guidelines.
Tamsin Lawson, the society's events and conference manager, managed her first BSP event very well indeed. She looked after every aspect of the organisation and was fully prepared when one of the speakers made it to the conference with just minutes to spare due to a delayed flight! Our stand-in presenter breathed a huge sigh of relief as Otto Zuhr took to the podium to talk about surgical excellence within periodontics. Otto's unflappable professionalism was reflected in Professor Kneebone's talk on performance and how operative surgery offers parallels within music, magic and theatre.

Still on the subject of clinical presentations, Ola Norderyd talked about understanding the variables involved in periodontal care and preventative programs. Eric Svensrud gave a highly entertaining account of minimally invasive and tissue friendly prosthodontics. His concise account included prosthodontic aesthetics and what the periodontist should expect when working in this field. Prof. Iain Chapple provided a very insightful and balanced presentation on implementing day-to-day risk assessment within periodontal practice and why it is important in a medico-legal context.

No such event would be complete without the networking and social side of things. One delegate commented that he comes to the BSP annual conference every year because it is like being 'back with the family'! The informal speakers' barbecue was held on Wednesday evening and a very grand conference dinner at the prestigious and traditional Skinners' Hall followed on Thursday. The hall is set back from the road on Dowgate Hill, almost hidden from view, and curiously addressed as number 8 ½! Built in 1670, with its breath-taking main hall, it was like something from a Harry Potter film in more ways than one.

It was at the conference dinner that Helen Cobley, the society's Executive Manager, thanked Ghilaine Ower for all her work over the past decade managing the BSP events and conferences. Ghilaine, who has now retired, was bestowed with an award as life-long member of the society and thanked wholeheartedly by Helen on behalf of everyone at the BSP.

The conference included, as you might expect, a level of competition. By viewing the entries for the poster competition, it was clear that the standard was very high. The winners were Reena Wadia for her excellent clinical poster and Richard Holliday for his on research, each receiving a cash prize and recognition of their endeavours. This year’s Sir Wilfred Fish Prize was presented to Emily Lu whose study tested the hypothesis that gingival fibroblasts promote epithelial growth whilst those from periodontal ligament result in an undifferentiated, immature epithelium similar to the junctional epithelial phenotype. The social media prize was won by Kevin Davey for most conference posts. Overall, more than 100,000 saw social media content thanks to the conference’s social media team of Reena Wadia and Andrea Williams.

“The conference feedback has exceeded our expectations” commented Ian Needleman. “The extra touches such as the optional fun run, breakout sessions, Early Career Group workshop and networking opportunities all added to the overall feeling that we have looked after all of our delegates, answering their conference requirements at every level. I am deeply grateful to our conference sponsors and exhibitors for the generous support, without whom this simply could not happen”.

We are now planning our next annual conference. Under the direction of 2018 president Dr Penny Hodge, it will take place in Edinburgh, Scotland, and promises something completely different. More details will be announced through our usual means of communication – enewsletter, website and social media.