Don’t let gum disease wipe the smile off your face – we take a look the UK’s official campaign for European Gum Health Awareness Day

On 12 May, for the first time in its 67-year history, the British Society of Periodontology (BSP) is taking the bold step of launching an innovative UK-wide campaign to raise awareness of gum disease and its far-reaching impact on general health. BSP President Dr Phil Ower says: ‘As gum disease is a serious public health issue, affecting the quality of life of over half the population, we felt it was time to shout a little louder.

‘Periodontitis is more than a standalone concern – the oral cavity is the gateway to the body so the links between perio disease and serious systemic conditions continue to strengthen. Perio health is vital for general health, wellbeing and longevity’. ‘We have been met with fantastic support from a variety of organisations, including the British Association of Dental Nurses, Public Health England, the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy and our strategic partners who are backing us unreservedly.

Social media
The campaign is a new departure for the BSP as it is aimed at the whole country – primarily the public, but health and dental professionals, too – using the power of social media. The ultimate message of the campaign is ‘Don’t let gum disease wipe the smile off your face’. There are several aims for the campaign that will kick-start on 12 May 2016, European Gum Health Awareness Day, and will continue for a few weeks afterwards:

- **To drive action** and encourage people to see a dental professional to have their gum health checked and improve their gum health
- **To encourage** people to participate in the campaign and help spread our message

Dubbed ‘the silent disease’, the BSP, under the direction and vision of Ian Needleman (Professor of Restorative Dentistry at UCL, Eastman Dental Institute and BSP President-Elect) created a film called ‘the Sound of Periodontitis’ for last year’s EuroPerio8 conference. The film features ordinary members of the public who generously gave their time to explain how gum disease has affected them. ‘I felt shame, I wasn’t speaking up as much as I would have done with a cancer condition’ commented one of the perio patients in the film, Angela Chatterton. It is a humbling and engaging video, well worth watching, to appreciate periodontitis from a patient perspective – this being another of the BSP’s objectives.

Selfies
The BSP is hoping that as many people as possible will take part in the forthcoming campaign, taking fun photos of themselves with BSP mouthcards and posting selfies online for perio awareness. More details of how to get involved will be made clear on the BSP website and through its social media channels very soon. The campaign has been in the planning stage for a few months and is being managed by the BSP with Ogilvy Healthworld, a leading London agency.

Why is the BSP doing it?
- Gum disease (periodontitis) is a major public health problem affecting quality of life
- More than 45% of UK adults affected
- It has known links to other serious conditions
- Gum disease is preventable and treatable if caught early

How can you help?
- Use the campaign hashtag #howsyoursmile
- Upload a ‘mouthie’ on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram – anywhere! (order more cards via website)
- Encourage your friends and family to get involved
- Host an awareness event at work (please let the BSP know about it)
- Promote it across your own social media platforms
- Visit the educational website for more details
- Have fun for a great cause!

The Sound of Periodontitis short film can be viewed at:
www.bsperio.org.uk/periodontal-disease/sound-of-periodontitis.html (10 minutes)