STATEMENT FROM THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF PERIODONTOLOGY

Wednesday 11 May 2016

"Why you don’t need to bother flossing!"

The above referenced article is not representative of the stance of the British Society of Periodontology (BSP) and contains factual errors. The BSP would like to state the following facts and request more balanced reporting on this subject. We have a panel of highly qualified scientists who are able to respond on a number of perio issues should you need more information. Indeed we welcome and encourage future reporting on gum health and can clarify and present facts on a wide range of oral health issues.

The British Society of Periodontology was dismayed to read in the Daily Mail (10 May 2016) and Daily Mail Online (11 May 2016) that the scientific advisor to the British Dental Association (BDA) was quoted using information taken from a study relating to the ineffectiveness of flossing. Professor Damien Walmsley has acknowledged that the quotes used were taken out of context to fit the general theme of the article about various health procedures being ineffective.

The overall message relayed by the Daily Mail article is that cleaning between the teeth is a waste of time. This is both misleading and categorically untrue. Interdental cleaning is an essential part of an effective daily cleaning routine to prevent the onset of gum disease.

A large European review of the scientific literature in relation to the effectiveness of different forms of cleaning between the teeth has been recently published. UK and European guidance supports the use of interdental brushes where there is space but floss where there is not.

The 11th European Workshop directed by the European Federation of Periodontology (EFP) on the prevention of periodontal and peri-implant diseases (2015) found, in relation to the effectiveness of interdental cleaning, that there was little evidence to support the use of floss in situations other than gum health. Instead, evidence supports the use of small interdental brushes for cleaning between the teeth, where there is space to do so, in preference to flossing. The recommendation from the European workshop to patients is: “Daily cleaning between your teeth using special interdental brushes is essential for treating and preventing gum disease. Floss is of little value unless the spaces between your teeth are too tight for the interdental brushes to fit without hurting or causing harm.” Therefore, floss is not a waste of time - it is a viable alternative to interdental brushing where appropriate.

In addition, “Delivering Better Oral Health” (Public Health England, 2014) also recommends cleaning daily between teeth, using floss or tape for small spaces and interdental brushes for larger spaces.

Editor’s notes:
• Contact Phil Ower, President of the British Society of Periodontology, for further clarification
  Email: philip.ower@btopenworld.com
• PR contact: Andrea Williams: andrea@fluentpr.co.uk
• The BSP is an established society and charity whose mission is “to promote public and professional awareness of periodontology and implant dentistry to achieve our vision of “Periodontal Health for a Better Life”. We do not represent any individual or group, but aim to serve the best interests of our patients and the public. BSP website: www.bsperio.org.uk
• The full recommendations from the European workshop can be found here: bsperio.org.uk/publications/index.php#pub77