

**Report on Undergraduate Student Symposium at Glasgow Dental Hospital**  
***“Understanding the patient experience of Periodontitis”***  
**Involving BSP Patient Forum representatives**

Following a symposium in 2019<sup>1</sup>, the University of Glasgow ran a second symposium for undergraduate dental and hygiene-therapy students, which aimed to further student understanding of the patient experience of periodontitis.

The event ran online, with five groups, each with twenty students, one staff member, and one patient volunteer. In advance of the symposium, the groups of students prepared questions and organised which students would lead the discussion. The questions were sent to the patients in advance.

Following the symposium, the students completed a written assignment, reflecting on how learning from a patient – outside of a clinical setting – impacted on their attitude to their future clinical practice.

The student response was extremely positive. Some of the student comments are cited below.

*“The best learning comes from talking about real life experience rather than a clinician telling us how they think patients are feeling. Getting the correct education from lectures and tutorials is very important but if you want to know more about patient management then getting information from a patient is better”*

The students felt learning about the patients’ perspectives in this setting enhanced their teaching and would change their clinical practice. Key themes recurred in the comments.

Learning from a patient emphasised the importance of communication around diagnosis:

*“You don’t get an appreciation of just how hard a diagnosis of periodontal disease can be for a person from the lectures”*

*“The patient spoke about how the diagnosis was explained so badly that they felt that it was them who had done something wrong...I want to ensure that I never make any patient feel the way this patient described to us.”*

Speaking to patients emphasised the importance of communicating the patient’s role in their treatment:

*“The interview with our patient really brought to light how vital it is to ensure your patient is well informed and does not feel judged when they see you for help”*

The patients were able to explain that living with periodontal disease is challenging:

*“I feel like I’ve gained a deeper understanding of what it is actually to live with the condition. This personal perspective has made me more empathetic to people who struggle with periodontitis”*

*“The patient.... likes wearing masks because of the fact she can hide her face. This was upsetting to hear but really showed the effects of the disease, both physically and mentally.”*

Five patients, including members of the BSP Patient Forum, generously gave up their time to speak with the students. The patients involved fed back that this was a positive experience.

Since the event, students have sought to initiate ways of raising awareness of periodontal disease – with ideas that are much more innovative and far reaching than anything their ‘more mature’ tutors would normally consider.

Hopefully, the future of periodontal health is in good hands.

**Professor Shauna Culshaw - March 2022**