Restoring a back to basic approach

Paul Tipton, President of the British Academy of Restorative Dentistry tells Scottish Dental how he aims to bring much-needed but neglected techniques back into use

Inaugural BARD president Paul Tipton explained that the academy came into existence less than two years ago following concerns he and a few colleagues – including Linda Greenwall, Tony Kilcoyne and Adam Toft among others – had about the quality of restorative teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. He said: “We were despairing at the quality of restorative dentistry teaching that goes on these days in dental hospitals and the quality of the dentists who are qualifying. I think that is both north and south although I think over a period of time the teaching up in Scotland may have been better, thanks to the work of people such as Professor Richard Ibbetson in Edinburgh.”

Paul explained that they felt there was a real need to get back to basics, with concerns over taking amalgam out of dental schools being a big driver.

He said: “That would mean that the graduates won’t be using amalgam at all, so they will just be using composite. Posterior composite is probably the most difficult technical skill for a young graduate or an undergraduate to do. So they are going to be asked to do posterior composites everywhere that amalgams are at the moment. The alternative is that they are going to put glass-ionomer in teeth, so either way the nation’s teeth are going to start suffering.”

He also added that graduates don’t get any occlusal training and are not trained on things such as bridge design. “So, some of the fundamentals of good restorative dentistry, that you can’t leave out to practice are just not being taught,” he said.

“Everyone is going cosmetic crazy and minimal intervention crazy. Of course, that is fine for a patient that only needs a little bit of work doing, but we all know that there are an awful lot of people who have massive amalgams and already have crown and bridge work, and dentists are just not being trained in how to deal with these people.

“So the aim of BARD is just to get back to teaching some good quality restorative dentistry techniques that maybe the dental hospitals and especially the younger graduates just aren’t doing at the moment.”

Paul is one of the most well-known and respected names in restorative dentistry, not just in the UK, but also internationally.

He is a specialist prosthodontist and has established a series of Tipton Training Academies in Manchester, Leeds, London and Dublin. As a young man he was a keen cricketer and between 1974 and 1978 he opened the batting for Lancashire County Cricket Club and enjoyed five years as a professional. He explained that his decision to follow a career in dentistry was down to the fact that his ability and ambition didn’t quite match up. He said: “I think I came to the realisation that, at best, I would only ever be a county cricketer. I didn’t really feel that I had the ability to go on beyond that.

“Also, the life of a county cricketer in those days was pretty mundane. You didn’t get paid a lot of money and in the winter time most of the professionals went on the dole, so it was not really an inspiring career choice. As a kid it seemed a great idea, but as I got into it and I realised that I wasn’t going to play for England, I thought I’d better do something else.”

Halfway through his spell at the club, Paul enrolled at university and between learning to study dentistry and when the term was over he came back to Lancashire to play the second half of the season. After graduating in 1978 Paul carr...
One of the main benefits of the Edinburgh study club – if it proves successful – is the fact that Scottish dentists will have access to top-quality courses and qualifications without travelling down south. As Stuart said: “The main aim of the study club is to share knowledge and promote understanding of restorative dentistry, if we can encourage people through BARD to gain further qualifications then I think that would be great.”

“However, at the moment that would involve attending courses down south. But, if we do get enough interest I know Paul would be keen to look into the possibility of doing something in Scotland.”

By training dentists in the “science of restorative dentistry and occlusion” Paul explained that the wider BARD mission is to help the nation’s teeth. He said: “The nation’s teeth are in a shocking mess. Every day in and day out. Many dentists out there are trying their best, but they don’t really have the skillset to know or do what is required. They don’t get anywhere. And it is the same with dentists – you have to practise it, work hard at it and go on lots of courses. That’s the same as a cricketer having lots of sessions in the nets.”

“The great parallel is that I worked really hard to get to the top of cricket by sheer hard work and I probably took that same work ethic into dentistry.” Paul has used this formidable work ethic in order to bring about the establishment of BARD and he has already spoken at study clubs in Stuke-on-Trent, Mid-Cheshire, Liverpool and, most recently, in Edinburgh at the end of May. The chairman of the Edinburgh branch, Midlothian GDP Stuart Campbell, explained that it is Paul’s ability to distil complex techniques into easy-to-digest talks and courses that makes him stand out. Stuart said: “He makes the complex simple and he brings things back to first principles so that, while some of his slides and the treatment plans he is carrying out appear to be very complex, he is able to break them down into their component parts.”

“A further advantage of his teaching is that he relates the scientific literature to clinical dentistry, which really reinforces evidence-based practice. And he puts just as much effort explaining the simpler techniques as he does the complex ones.” Stuart got to know Paul after attending three of his year-long restorative courses in Manchester over the past few years and joined the academy in autumn last year as the chairman of the Edinburgh section. He said: “I think the aim is to widen and deepen knowledge of restorative dentistry among the profession and therefore improve our clinical practice. We would like to encourage like-minded dentists to get together at meetings on a regular basis to discuss and chat about our needs and wants. “As well as that, we plan on having high-quality speakers, such as Paul and other affiliates of BARD, come to talk to us. So we aim to get them up to Scotland and learn from them.”

Paul explained that, although there is already a British Society for Restorative Dentistry (BSRD) that has been around for more than 40 years, its membership is predominantly hospital dentists and academics. He said: “We wanted to make this a bit more wet-fingered and practical as opposed to hospital based. We wanted to get away from hospital consultants being there lecturing to GPs. We wanted wet-fingered dentists themselves to be lecturing to each other and in the organisation of the academy. “The BSRD has been around for some years, so we are the new kids on the block. We aim to put on proper courses and CPD, do certificates and diplomas equally as well. We want to give people a pathway that is not via the hospitals or the Royal College of Surgeons, but another pathway where they can get decent accreditation.”

And Stuart explained that meeting up with peers and colleagues at events such as study clubs is a vital learning tool. He said: “I think it is important simply because you can learn much more from your fellow practitioners. Most clinicians will have faced similar challenges in general dental practice. The way we manage and deal with them can be helped immensely by chatting with others. “But we shouldn’t lose sight of what the scientific data is telling us and meetings such as these are important in encouraging practitioners to use the dental literature for solutions to clinical questions. Having clinicians like Paul critically reviewing the dental literature is extremely helpful.”

The academy actively espouses a back-to-basics approach, but Paul said the system down in England means that restorative dentistry is becoming increasingly rare. He said: “With the NHS system where there is less and less restorative dentistry being done on the NHS. You get the same UDA for a root filling as you do for taking a booth out, so you take the tooth out. “I did crown and bridge work on the NHS and I like to think that, in the nine years I spent in the NHS, I helped many patients using some quality restorative work on the NHS. But nowadays it just doesn’t get done!”

Paul Ivimey, President of the British Academy of Restorative Dentistry