

# ‘If organisations didn’t have members who have experience of those they represent, things would never progress or move forward’



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In 2021, Bennie and Koka studied the proportion of women editors of prominent medical and dental journals.<sup>1</sup> They discovered that of the 91 dental journals that had 100 editors, only 15 were women. For the 91 dental journals, there were a total of 828 associate editors, of whom 638 were men and 190 were women. Significantly, there were fewer women chief editors for dental journals compared to their medical counterparts.

Difficult statistics to digest, whichever way you look at it. *BDJ In Practice* spoke to **Heather Bradbury**, *BDJ* and *BDJ Open* Publisher, **Kate Quinlan**, *BDJ News* Editor and *BDJ Team* Editor and **Danielle Yates**, *BDJ* Assistant Publisher, to gauge their thoughts on these data, and their experience of dental publishing.



*Given you are integral to the day-to-day running of the BDJ, what do you make of these figures?*

**HB** Sadly, I’m not surprised to read this, though I am quite shocked at the discrepancy in figures. Historically, men would have held senior editorial positions, such as associate editor and/or chief editor. As with most industries, it has taken time for this trend to change. Based on these figures, the field of dental journals seems to be falling behind somewhat, and urgent

action is required to rectify this imbalance, so as to ensure that associate/chief editors – who make decisions about what and who gets published – are diverse and represent the demographics of the field.

**KQ** I am surprised by the figures overall. Our associate editors do tend to be male, dentally-trained, contributing to the Journal on top of their day job in dentistry or dental

education. But for those editors pursuing a career in publishing, like Heather, Danielle and myself, I would expect more of the editors to be women. Our employer is Springer Nature, and female employees are in the majority.

More women work in the publishing industry overall than men – and I believe women hold more senior posts than in other industries (bucking the trend there!).

Historically, of course, as Heather suggests, chief editors would have been men. Those entering the traditional professions of dentistry, medicine and law would also have been men, and it has taken time for this to change. These days there are more female dentistry graduates than male; however, we know a lot of women pursue a career in dentistry because of the potential to at some point work flexibly: take time off to have children then work part time or flexible hours. In this scenario, women may have less time to take on additional roles or responsibilities such as being associate editor for a journal.

It is cliché to say that women want to have it all these days – a good job and family life – but not everyone has the energy to do both and also have time to sit down at the computer again in the evening to work on other projects. Often women work full time but still manage the majority of looking after children and, for example, housework and ‘life admin’ as well. This isn’t true for everyone! But may explain some of those figures around associate and chief editors.

**DY** Focusing on the trend of men dominating STEM, these figures do not really surprise me, although I am somewhat surprised at the scale of the large disparity between men and women when looking at publishing, which is a sector normally dominated by women. I consider myself extremely lucky to work within a team of so many incredible women and am aware of how uncommon this is; while there has been a push for more women working in STEM, there is still much more to be done. In particular, pushing for inclusion of women of colour, trans women, LGBTQ+ women, disabled women and women from low-income backgrounds. While women dominate in publishing, perhaps it’s more important to look at roles such as editors and chief editors than overall numbers, as demonstrated in the figures here.

*As of the last GDC registration report, there were more female than male dentists, and significantly more when assessing DCP figures. How important is it for organisations to reflect the workforce they represent?*

**KQ** I think it is important for high level boards who make decisions about a company and its workforce to reflect that workforce, yes. So top level boards should be diverse and representative of the workforce they represent, indeed.

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Likewise for the *BDJ* Portfolio, I think it’s important that our Editor-in-Chief has a dental background and also those people on our Editorial Board. As for my colleagues and I on the editorial team, I think what is important is that we have our readers’ interests in mind and that we have the required skills to fulfil our roles and serve the readership and our contributing authors – which I believe we do! None of us have dental backgrounds – although I have a fair knowledge of the industry after 18 years.

**HB** I agree, Kate. It’s vital for organisations to reflect the workforce they represent – the decisions they make and the subsequent implications should be considered and weighed up by a diverse board that is representative of that workforce. This guarantees a wider range of backgrounds, ideas and abilities, all of which help to provide more than one perspective on an issue. It also ensures a deeper understanding of issues which may affect certain groups more than others – for example, menopause in women, which is discussed in Bell *et al.*’s brilliant Opinion piece ‘It’s time to talk about the M word.’<sup>2</sup>

**DY** It’s a clean sweep! If organisations didn’t have members who have experience of those they represent, things would never progress or move forward. A diverse workforce

and organisation allows for a multitude of viewpoints and can only allow a team to evolve. The *BDJ* Portfolio Editorial Boards for example include highly intelligent individuals in their fields but also encompass almost equal numbers of men and women; in the case of *Evidence-Based Dentistry*, more women sit on the Board than men.

*Does more need to be done in the dental and editorial fields to improve matters of EDI?*

**DY** Yes, I think so. The fact that out of 91 dental journals, only 17% of editors are women, and of 828 associate editors, only 190 are women, shows we still have a way to go with representation in these higher editorial positions.

Moreover, dentistry is still a very white field – Black dentists and DCPs are under-represented in UK dentistry as a whole and people from BAME backgrounds experience barriers to progressing in the profession. The *BDJ* Diversity and Inclusion Collection includes a variety of papers across EDI and hopefully suggestions from here and elsewhere will be implemented into real life action.

**HB** From a dental perspective, I know that EDI matters have been a priority for the BDA over the last couple of years, with the creation of an EDI Committee (with racism and gender working groups) and a commitment to reviewing representational structures and developing work to tackle racism in dentistry. It’s tricky to say from my own personal perspective whether more needs to be done in the dental field; however, looking at the numerous articles in the collection Danielle mentions, which address topics such as racial inequalities in dental education and gender imbalances of dental boards, it’s clear to see that representation in dentistry is still an ongoing challenge which will require continued efforts to be addressed.

From an editorial perspective, Springer Nature has already taken some very encouraging steps. September 2022 marks a year since we announced our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) commitment in research publishing.<sup>3</sup> This includes becoming intentionally inclusive, such as the creation of resources to promote inclusive recruitment practices, engaging our stakeholders across the research community and publishing industry, and

improving our editorial policies (e.g. updated guidance on sex and gender reporting in research studies).

**KQ** In dentistry I think there is some encouraging work going on already such as that of the Diversity in Dentistry Action Group (DDAG), and the creation of the BDA and CGDent's Racial Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. EDI was very much on BDA Past President Russ Ladwa's agenda when I interviewed him last year.<sup>4</sup>

Editorially, I'm not sure. I think everyone has a fair chance to be appointed to an editorial role if they have the right skills/experience/qualifications for that role

*Past President Susie Sanderson set in motion a trend of three female BDA Presidents in four years – the current of which is also Editor of EBD. Is this progress, and if so, would you like to see such progress replicated across dental journals in the UK?*

**DY** I think it would be great to see more women in positions such as these across UK dental journals. Perhaps this might persuade more women to aim and apply for roles which they didn't think they could before. As long as the women in these roles are supporting the other women and people in marginalised groups working with them, and this helps the journal progress, I'd love to see this trend continue!

**KQ** I think that's excellent. It would be great to have a female Editor-in-Chief for the *BDJ* in the future, but only if they were right for the job! I was delighted to interview the new, female, Brazilian Editor of the *Journal of the Irish Dental Association* recently. She is also a Lecturer in Restorative Dentistry and has young children, a great example of 'having it all' – look out for her interview in the *BDJ* in October.

**HB** I do think this is progress. O'Brien *et al.* wrote in their article 'Balancing the dental boards' that 'the imbalance that [they] have found leads to a lack of women role models and the problem is therefore exacerbated over time'.<sup>5</sup> Having women in a high-level position such as this not only serves to reflect a large proportion of the workforce it represents, but also paves the way for other women to do the same.

*What advice would you give to any young, aspiring writers or*

*authors who perhaps want to take their dental careers in an editorial direction?*

**HB** It can be daunting but my advice would be (as clichéd as it sounds) to just take that first step and get writing! Think about a topic in dentistry that you are passionate about and/or that perhaps does not receive much media attention, and write about it – for the *BDJ*, you could do this either in the form of a Letter to the Editor or an Opinion piece. Another option is to contribute a Book Review – these are only 400 words so are an ideal starting point. I am always looking for new contributors to our Research Insights section, which involves writing a summary of a recently published *BDJ* Research paper – this is a great way to get some initial writing experience.

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For any aspiring authors who are passionate about strengthening the dialogue between dental practitioners and dental researchers, my advice would be to register to become a commentator for *Evidence-Based Dentistry*, and to contribute a summary of a systematic review. Again, these don't have to be long pieces, but it will give you that necessary experience. Publishing can be a confusing and intimidating field for those who are new to it, but once you have familiarised yourself with the process and know what to expect, it takes away a lot of the initial pressure.

**DY** From personal experience, writing and editorial work will come with practice and time. Your dental expertise will stand you in great stead and perhaps having some publications under your belt might help if you want to explore the editorial route.

**KQ** I would recommend reading our 'Information for new writers' on the website and also consider attending the New Writers' Workshop. Even writing a Letter to the Editor or reviewing a dental event for the Upfront

## Further information

- Anyone interested in becoming a contributor should contact us via [bdjmanuscripts@nature.com](mailto:bdjmanuscripts@nature.com) and ask to be added to our writers' list.
- For more inspiration, check out our 'How to get published' guide: <https://go.nature.com/3rag1qa>.
- The BDA have some suggestions on writing for dental publications which might prove helpful: <https://bda.org/news-centre/blog/want-to-write-for-dental-publications>
- For further information about the Workshop, check out: <https://go.nature.com/3BEYPz1>
- The *BDJ* Portfolio's Diversity and inclusion collection can be accessed at: [www.nature.com/collections/hafaadbedh](http://www.nature.com/collections/hafaadbedh)

section are great ways to make a start. If you'd like to write something with a dental team focus, do consider *BDJ Team*, as I am always looking for contributors for the ten issues a year. ♦

## References

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4. Russ Ladwa: 'I've always stood up for people who can't speak for themselves'. *Br Dent J* 2021; **230**: 509-512.
5. O'Brien K, Ahmad M, Harry L, *et al.* Balancing the dental boards. *Br Dent J* 2021; **230**: 804-806.

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