

# Portrait or landscape?

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EDITORIAL

You may be forgiven for not being aware that the last full week in March was NOW. By which I am not attempting to muscle-in on the new Dr Who series and tempt you into time travel, but to ask if you knew about National Orthodontic Week (NOW). Get it?

If you were not aware then don't panic. There is no implied criticism of the idea or organisation of this initiative's first outing and, as these events do, it will doubtless grow and reach a wider and greater audience as time goes on. You may also be forgiven for wondering why I mention this, since we are nowadays bombarded by days, weeks, months and sometimes years focussing on various social and health campaigns; not a few of which are dentally orientated. The longest running of these in the UK is doubtless the BDHF's Smile Month (originally Smile Week, which proves the point of sustained growth over time).

What interested me in particular is that NOW is the brain-child of the British Orthodontic Society (BOS) which as well as describing itself in the associated publicity as 'a charity which promotes the very best in education, research and care of patients', also happens to be the specialist society for orthodontists. Now, here's the thing (as the modern vernacular of chat-show hosts has it): what I believe is significant is not only the initiative itself, which broadly speaking has to be applauded, but the fact that it is a specialist society that is reaching out to a public audience.

In this it has similarities to other arms of dentistry such as the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and its publicity enterprises involving the promotion of the values of such treatment and the importance of seeking the particular skills, talents and on-going educational attainments of its members.

## EXQUISITELY TURNED OUT ENAMEL

We have not often seen examples of this type of promotion in times past but I believe we are once again witnessing the swirls in the progression of the business of dentistry. Logic dictates it has to flow this way in the coming years in order to survive and prosper. It is about enhancing appearance, emphasising the value of a good smile and appealing to an audience with a message about lifestyle as distinct, but not exclusively detached, from good oral health in general. For which reason, presumably, we are less likely to see the advent of British Oral Pathology Week or National Dental Radiography Fortnight. But watch this space as I may yet have to eat my own words.

Whatever one thinks about the specialty of orthodontics and the specialists who are orthodontists, and one has to be aware of detractors both professional and lay, the notion of explaining the advantages of good oral health in relation to the regulation of teeth and jaws does make a useful addition to the public's knowledge. The rise in popularity of adult orthodontics, the advent of new technologies such as lingual orthodontics and of mini-screws and the slightly concerning statistic that 45% of UK adults are unhappy with the appearance of their teeth all indicate that the discipline has a bright future.

The launch of NOW showed great originality and was held at the National Portrait Gallery at the somewhat early hour (for such ventures) of 8.00am. However, the popularity of the venue clearly overcame the sleepy resistance of Monday morning journalists and a fair representative sample was in attendance. As well as a comprehensive introduction to the enterprise, also included was a private view of an exhibition of the photographic works of Irving Penn, from 1944-2007; the link being the facial image and visage. Dozens of black and white photographs grey-scaled the walls eliciting the appropriate reactions of fascination, awe, amusement and inspiration but I was struck that only four out of all of them had the subject showing anything of their teeth. This probably has more to say about the protocols and expectations of the serious nature of portraiture than the status of the subjects' dentitions, or orthodontic results, but is an interesting reflection on how we view the mouth at times of gravitas in comparison to ideals associated with health and well-being. Grace Kelly and Duke Ellington were the notable two studies which radiated the lightness of exquisitely turned out enamel in an otherwise tight lipped world of the close-up lens.

All of this would have been more than enough substance with which to kick-start any old week but as I walked out into the Trafalgar Square sunshine at the start of National Orthodontic Week I couldn't help but speculate that the orthodontists were showing a canny appreciation not only of the portrait but also of the modern dental landscape.

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