

Ethics revisited

Shaun Sellars concludes his series on ethical dilemmas in dentistry with this final contribution in the last *BDJ* issue of the year.



After over five years, I've finally decided to hang up my pen. So, as I write this final column, I find myself reflecting on the transformation of dental ethics over the last half a decade. It's been a journey – not just for the profession but for each of us navigating the complexities of patient care, professional relationships, and societal expectations. Writing these columns has been a privilege, offering the chance to explore the ethical frameworks that underpin our daily decisions and, I hope, sparking some thought-provoking discussions along the way.

We were still grappling with Montgomery's full implications when I started this series. Fast forward to now, and while the principles remain, our conversations around consent have deepened. We now acknowledge that true shared decision-making isn't a tick-box exercise but a dynamic process. It's about empathy, communication, and ensuring patients feel heard, not just informed. Technology, like digital treatment planning and intraoral scanners, has revolutionised how we present information. Yet, with these advancements come new challenges,

such as ensuring that digital tools don't overshadow the human connection central to patient care.

And the issue of equality has come into sharper focus in recent years. The pandemic pulled back the curtain on disparities in access to care, and discussions about inclusivity have moved from the periphery to the forefront. We're now asking more challenging questions: Are we doing enough to make dentistry accessible to marginalised communities? How do we ensure our practices are welcoming and non-judgemental for all patients? These aren't easy questions, but the shift in discourse is a step forward.

Perhaps the most significant change has been the growing emphasis on mental health – ours and our patients'. Five years ago, discussing burnout and the pressures of dentistry felt almost taboo. Today, it's part of the conversation. We're seeing greater awareness of our profession's psychological toll, coupled with an increasing commitment to supporting each other. That shift in culture, where vulnerability is met with understanding rather than stigma, is one of the most heartening developments I've witnessed.

But what about the future? Tomorrow's ethical dilemmas will likely centre around technology. Artificial intelligence is already reshaping diagnostics, and its influence will only grow. With this comes the responsibility to ensure that innovation enhances, rather than replaces, the human element of care.

The ethical landscape of dentistry will continue evolving, shaped by societal shifts, technological advances, and our commitment to doing better. If there's one lesson I've learned, it's that ethics isn't static – it's a living, breathing part of what we do. It challenges us to reflect, adapt, and, above all, remain human in our approach.

I leave you with this: Keep asking questions. Keep challenging norms. And never lose sight of why we chose this profession in the first place. Because at the heart of ethical dentistry lies something beautifully simple: a desire to do right by our patients, our colleagues, and ourselves. It's been an honour to be able to write for you all. Thank you for being part of the conversation.

Passing on the *BDJ* baton

For this issue, the cover celebrated is one of Stephen Hancocks' favourites, a pop art style cover published in Volume 233 Issue 10 (25 November 2022). It was part of a series of covers celebrating 150 years of the *BDJ* through visual storytelling, illustrated by Rachel Jackson. The pop art style on the cover from that year depicts a dentist in different colours and style – suggesting that variation represents diversification – this diversification representing the dentist as a person.

To mark Stephen's 20 years' service as Editor-in-Chief, the editorial team and cover artist decided to create a

commemorative final cover featuring Stephen himself in pop art style as he passes on the *BDJ* baton. He smiles from behind a small mountain of journals while humbly accepting applause for his years of leadership.

Elsewhere in this issue of the *BDJ*, you can find Stephen's final editorial – exactly 20 years after the first; letters to the editor from members of the Editorial Board; and dedications within this news section from regular, recent authors published in the *BDJ*.

A farewell event for Stephen is due to be held in London later this month.

