

## CHARITY FOCUS

# A cause for applause

As 2025 draws to a close, we invited dental and oral health related charities and initiatives to share their highlights and activities from this year.

## BDA Benevolent Fund

The past year has been one of reflection, resilience, and renewed purpose for the BDA Benevolent Fund, the charity dedicated to supporting dentists, dental students, and their families during periods of financial and emotional hardship. As pressures affecting the profession continue to evolve, the charity experienced record levels of demand for assistance.

The charity collaborated with beneficiaries this year to feature seven new personal accounts illustrating the varied challenges faced within the dental community. These narratives included experiences of addiction, bereavement, health crises, and significant life disruption, as well as the journeys of refugee dentists attempting to re-establish their professional lives in the UK. Collectively, these stories offered insight into lived realities while underscoring the rising volume of applications received.

In addition to direct financial support, the charity continued to emphasise prevention and early intervention by sharing practical guidance. Advice covered essential budgeting, insurance considerations, and household energy-saving measures, particularly important during periods of increased living costs.

Dr Jessica Burley shared her personal experience of stillbirth, offering thoughtful guidance for colleagues and underscoring the importance of compassionate, well-informed workplace support during periods of profound grief. A resource for dentists and the dental team was developed and promoted through Baby Loss Awareness Week.

The charity also promoted its free will-writing service during Free Wills Month, encouraging dental professionals to plan while considering the role of legacy gifts in sustaining future charitable work.

A major challenge this year was a 30% reduction in voluntary income at a time when grant applications were increasing significantly. In response, the BDA Benevolent Fund issued a renewed appeal to Local Dental Committees (LDCs). Although LDC donations remain a vital component of the charity's income, nearly 60% had not contributed at the time of the appeal.

To strengthen awareness, visibility, and early signposting, the Trustees also launched a national call for volunteer ambassadors at the AGM. This volunteer role is designed to help colleagues recognise when friends or peers may be struggling, increase understanding of the support available, and ensure that no dentist in difficulty navigates hardship alone. Ambassadors will act as local points of contact, raising the profile and funds on behalf of the charity within practices, networks, and regional groups.

Insights from the charity's service data highlighted a marked gender disparity: men were considerably less likely to contact the helpline despite experiencing similar pressures to women. While many enquiries related to legal or financial matters, the charity emphasised the importance of addressing mental health more openly within the

profession. Throughout the year, it continued to promote its wellbeing portal and counselling services, providing confidential and accessible support for those in need.

The dental community also mourned the untimely death of Dr John Ulahannan in November 2024. A dedicated dentist and trustee, he made a significant contribution to the profession and to the charity's governance. Plans are now underway to celebrate his life in 2026 through an art exhibition recognising his service and commitment.

This summary reflects a year of challenges met with compassion, innovation, and collective effort. Every donation, conversation, and act of advocacy matters in building a stronger, more supportive dental community.

Please contact the BDA Benevolent Fund if you'd like to donate or get involved. Visit <https://www.bdabenevolentfund.org.uk/> or email [info@bdabenevolentfund.org.uk](mailto:info@bdabenevolentfund.org.uk).

## NSK Ikigai



NSK Ikigai team members, eight of whom are due to travel to Tanzania in January 2026

In January 2026 the NSK Ikigai team will travel to Tanzania to deliver an intensive Train-the-Trainer programme focused on oral health and the prevention of female genital mutilation (FGM).

The NSK Ikigai Oral Hygiene Community is a dedicated support network for dental hygienists and therapists. Created by dental hygienists Siobhan Kelleher and Gemma O'Callaghan and supported by NSK's Alexander Breitenbach and Francois Faro, its primary goal is to bring people together.

Eight educators are travelling to Tanzania: Siobhan (the clinical and project lead), Cat Edney, Lauren Long, Robbie Stewart,

# Twenty years of impact: the Mouth Cancer Foundation's journey

By Jocelyn Harding, dental hygienist and President Elect of the Mouth Cancer Foundation, Gloucester, UK

What an extraordinary year 2025 has been. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Mouth Cancer Foundation – an important milestone for a charity founded by Mr Vinod Joshi OBE with a simple but powerful purpose: to provide patients and carers with a safe, compassionate community in which to share experiences and find support. As the saying goes, 'mighty oaks from little acorns grow', and the Foundation is a testament to that.

Since becoming a Clinical Ambassador in 2018, under the mentorship of Past President the late Dr Philip Lewis MBE, I have been privileged to witness firsthand the strength of this community and its unwavering commitment to raising awareness of head and neck cancer. The journey through diagnosis, treatment and survivorship can be devastating, and the need for connection, understanding and advocacy has never been greater.

According to the Oral Health Foundation's State of Mouth Cancer Report 2024,<sup>1</sup> more than 10,000 people in the UK are now diagnosed with mouth cancer each year. Despite this dramatic rise, public awareness remains worryingly low. Over the past two decades, cases have increased by 133%, yet many still do not recognise early signs or know when to seek professional advice. This gap in understanding is deeply concerning.

As dental professionals, we hold a crucial responsibility. We are often the first to notice subtle abnormalities and have the opportunity to make life-saving interventions. Through my work across dental and hospital settings – and through my involvement with the Mouth Cancer Foundation – I have had the honour of supporting patients before, during and long after treatment. Increasing numbers of survivors continue to face late effects: persistent physical, functional and emotional challenges resulting from cancer therapy. Current evidence indicates that there may be up to 60 distinct late effects associated with head and neck cancer treatment.

The Mouth Cancer Foundation continues to be a vital voice for patients, families and professionals, championing awareness, early



Joss Harding (left) with Mr Mahesh Kumar, President of the Mouth Cancer Foundation, at this year's 20th anniversary 10 km run in London

detection and comprehensive survivorship support. This year, the fundraising efforts of patients, caregivers and dental professionals have been truly exceptional, helping to amplify the charity's message and significantly increase awareness across social media platforms.

I encourage every dental professional to play a part – by promoting Mouth Cancer Action Month, supporting patients through recovery, or simply talking more openly about the risks, signs and symptoms of mouth cancer in their everyday practice. Feel free to connect with the Mouth Cancer Foundation through their website, where you can access information, patient handbooks, educational resources, downloadable materials, and links to the Facebook community or the Monday evening Zoom support meetings.

## References

1. Oral Health Foundation. The State of Mouth Cancer UK Report 2024. 2024. Available at <https://www.dentalhealth.org/thestateofmouthcancer> (accessed 8 December 2025).

Anna Peterson, Gulab Singh, Amanda Harbrow Harris and Nina Farmer. Further team members supported through fundraising.

Over a series of practical workshops and community sessions, the team will equip teachers, healers, and local leaders with the skills, tools, and culturally respectful approaches they need to teach good oral hygiene habits and to prevent and respond to FGM in survivor-centred, rights-respecting ways.

All materials and activities will be co-created with Tanzanian partners so they fit local languages, beliefs, and realities.

The NSK Ikigai team are excited about the challenge and committed to respectful partnership, practical impact, and building lasting local capacity so trainers can continue this work long after the team returns.

Ikigai is a Japanese word which roughly translates as 'a reason for being'; iki also means 'life' and gai, 'value'.

## Folkestone dental team treat 800 in rural Uganda

A small team from the UK has made a big difference in Uganda, providing free dental care to hundreds of people who otherwise have little or no access to treatment.

The team, including dentist Dr Patel and dental nurses Bishnu Shrees Kaucha and Jodie Griggs from H Patel & Associates in Folkestone, joined forces with the Uganda Dental Association (UDA) and a wider group of 17 volunteers to run a community dental outreach clinic in rural central Uganda.

Working long hours in challenging conditions, the group saw more than 800 patients attend the makeshift clinic set up in a school hall over three days, offering extractions, fillings, restorations, oral health education and pain relief.

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The BDA is owned and run by its members. We are a not-for-profit organisation – all our income is reinvested for the benefit of the profession.



Dental team providing free care to a patient in rural Uganda

Many of those treated had been living with long-term toothache or infections.

Dr Patel said: 'We were overwhelmed by numbers in need but have learned a huge amount from our Ugandan counterparts in terms of public oral health education, which is almost a forgotten art in UK practice.'

'People queued from early morning, some travelling for hours just to be seen. Although there are issues, we take the existence of widespread dental care for granted at home.'

The outreach took place at Alice Memorial Primary School in the Buikwe district in central Uganda and UK teams worked side by side with Ugandan counterparts to bring relief to local families and pupils of the school. The clinic ran workshops to teach children the basics of daily tooth-brushing and diet for good oral health and distributed toothbrushes donated by UK school children.

Anita, the project leader for the UDA, commented: 'Everyone worked together – dentists, nurses, students, and volunteers – it was truly a team effort.'

The UK team helped supply dental instruments and materials donated by practices and suppliers back home, all of which went directly into patient care.

The experience has inspired some of the participants to continue supporting dental access projects for those who can't access dentistry abroad and to raise awareness of oral health inequalities around the world. They intend to carry out further work and campaign for oral health education to be delivered in UK schools. ■

Correction to: Interprofessional education, cultural awareness and community collaboration

The original article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-025-9367-y>.

Journal correction note:

*News. Br Dent J* 2025; **239**: 606–607.

When this news article was first published, Aditi Naik's affiliation was incorrect. Aditi Naik is an undergraduate medical student.

The authors apologise for any inconvenience caused.