

# Volume 240 Issue 2 cover: Anonymous painting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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The present cover of the *BDJ* could be a version of 'Operation Inutile' or 'Futile Operation' seen in earlier paintings such as the one pictured here by David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690), from the Wellcome Collection.

The original 'Operation Inutile' or 'Futile Operation' was a quack remedy for the 'Stone of Madness' thought to reside on the forehead of those of unsound mind, or in the frontal lobes of the brain. Such an operation can be seen as long ago as 1500 in a painting by Hieronymus Bosch,<sup>1</sup> and then in a painting of 'The Surgical Operation' by Teniers the Younger in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> where the operator is an alchemist. In the print from Paris<sup>3</sup> dated about 1762 from which this painting seems to be derived (rather than the other way round, although the print, as is usual, is reversed, with the operator using his left hand – so there may be another 'original') the operator is still engaged with the forehead of the patient, in this case with removing a wart (verrua).

The mystery is why the artist should have changed the focus of attention to the teeth – still using a delicate instrument inappropriate for an extraction at least, possibly a scalpel, from the open instrument case. The scrap of tissue on the green cloth is



A surgeon removing moles from a grimacing patient's head. Engraving after D. Teniers. David Teniers the Younger. 1700–1799.

not identifiable as a tooth. The medicine bottle and measure may have contained alcohol, which allows the victim to face his fate, but also is perhaps more valuable in giving later amnesia.

In the print the patient has a good set of teeth, well observed, and interesting in someone apparently of later middle age. The teeth in the painting are less well observed, but apparently still all present, odd in the context.

The setting for the painting is also curious, the window is unglazed, and we are high up, observing distant clouds, although at least the lighting is good.

Which all begs the question – why did this artist paint this picture of such a distressing scene, and to whom did they hope to sell it?

## References

1. Museo del Prado Madrid. The Extraction of the Stone of Madness. Available at <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-extraction-of-the-stone-of-madness/313db7a0-f9bf-49ad-a242-67e95b14c5a2> (accessed 12 January 2026).
2. Wikimedia Commons. File:David teniers-cirujano-prado.jpg. Available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:David\\_teniers-cirujano-prado.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:David_teniers-cirujano-prado.jpg) (accessed 12 January 2026).
3. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire. L'Opération Inutile. Available at <https://www.mahmam.ch/collection/oeuvres/loperation-inutile/e-2003-0179> (accessed 12 January 2026).

## Care leavers: free NHS dentistry empty gesture without access

The British Dental Association (BDA) has strongly supported moves to extend free dental care to young people leaving the care system until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, but stressed without meaningful efforts to expand access it will be an empty gesture.

Pregnant women and new mothers already have entitlement to free dental care, but over 1.5 million have missed out since lockdown owing to the ongoing access crisis.

BDA analysis of official data places unmet need for NHS dentistry at nearly 14 million, or well over one in four of England's adult population. The Government has not allocated any additional funding to close this access gap.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Extending exemptions to young people leaving the care system makes perfect sense. Charges remain a tangible barrier to vulnerable patients, encouraging millions to delay or avoid care. But to ensure this isn't an empty gesture government must ensure they can actually get an appointment.'

## The King's New Year Honours 2026

Four individuals within dentistry have been recognised in the King's New Year Honours 2026: Tara Renton with an OBE, Christopher Tredwin with an MBE, Kate Taylor-Weetman with an MBE, and Elaine Simmons with a BEM.

Tara Renton, Emeritus Professor in Oral Surgery, King's College London, was awarded OBE for services to dentistry.

Christopher Jeremy Tredwin, lately Head of Peninsula Dental School, was awarded MBE for services to general practice.

Awarded MBE for services to dentistry, Catherine (Kate) Louise Taylor-Weetman, a Consultant in Dental Public Health, was interviewed for the *BDJ* in August 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Elaine Olga Simmons, a dental nurse tutor and assessor, was recognised with a BEM for services to dentistry and dental nursing.

## References

1. Quinlan K. Specialising in dental public health. *Br Dent J* 2025; **239**: 236–239.