

BAOS Presidents Newsletter, May 2021

Inequality in Surgery

Baroness Helena Kennedy QC

The President, Professor Neil Mortensen, of the Royal College of Surgeons of England asked Baroness Helena Kennedy QC around a years ago to lead a review into diversity and inclusion for the College. This request was triggered by vocal expressions of dissatisfaction from a significant part of the surgical profession, largely women and people of colour. This review was published just ahead of my interview with Baroness Helena Kennedy QC for our **BAOS Digital #BAOSbytesize** event on 15th April and so this was perfect timing to talk about the findings and recommendations. If you missed the live interview, then you can find it on our BAOS website or on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7XibBGUEiU&t=17s>

Baroness Kennedy has been instrumental in changing the Judiciary and bringing about more equitable outcomes. Committing to the vision to be diverse and inclusive is important for fairness in our own workplaces such that in the spirit of respect and compassion for each other, we obtain the best outcomes for our patients and their health.

The BAOS Commitment to Inclusion and CDO England Office

Back on the 19th March the BAOS Council published, 'The BAOS Commitment to Inclusion' on its website. This states,

'Like our patients, Oral Surgeons and their Teams are not all the same. We are committed to confronting discrimination in all its forms and to creating a more inclusive environment in which everyone can thrive to best serve our patients' interests.'

Since then the CDO England Office have published an, 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within Dentistry' May 21 report by a Diversity in Dentistry Action Group and BAOS Council on behalf of the members have been pleased to be one of the stakeholders supporting this work. (Attached)

There is currently a plethora of reports and statements around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This is a good thing, as hopefully this focus will galvanise the opportunity to get real change. However, words and reports will not do it, only our behaviours will change things! So we should consider our own attitudes, take advantage of workplace training, influence change when the opportunity arises and politely call out inappropriate behaviours when needed.

Royal College of Surgeons of England

The RCS England report makes a number of recommendations that are pertinent to our own BAOS family. The report highlighted the need to support Staff and Associate Specialist (SAS) surgeons with a clear strategy to advocate for change. BAOS have a large number of members holding these contracts. Several recommendations are about the RCS Leadership and reform of election processes. Currently the appointment of the BAOS President position is determined by election from the BAOS Council only and I think that this is something that we should consider

changing to that the whole membership participate. A further recommendation was around flexibility of career options sufficient to embrace family responsibilities. This is not just for women. A new generation of men also think differently about fatherhood! They too want to spent time their children and take their share of domestic load. I remember my experience of one of our children being born in the early hours, and being relieved that this time fitted well with my on-call duties, allowed me to attend the 8.00am ward round the following day, drive my wife and new baby home, and then return for the morning clinic, apologising for being 30 minutes late! I am very happy that the workplace is now more flexible and continues to improve! You can find the RCSEng report at <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/about-the-rcs/about-our-mission/diversity-review-2021/>

Clinical Academics

A recent report regarding Clinical Academics in medicine and dentistry for NIHR highlighted a number of particular issues with the difficulty of competing demands of the university and NHS. Women reported being subjected to biases in relation to their reproductive decision-making and career progression milestones, and this caused them anxiety. Gay men were also subjected to discrimination that was so severe that it impacted upon their choice of specialty. There is clearly much to do and the importance of role models and mentors is highlighted in the report that is well worth a read. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14667.92966

<https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/inequalities-in-clinical-academic-careers/>

Black dental students

One of my own black dental students at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, together with his tutor, recently published a paper in the BDJ describing his own experiences. There is a problem at school age, with few black role models, giving talks in schools, helping prepare application etc. and so under-representation continues in the profession because young black children can't envisage themselves becoming a dentist.

[Kadiyo T, Mellish V. Is Black Lives Matter over now? BDJ 2020:229;326.](#)

Domestic Violence

I took the opportunity in my interview with Baroness Helena Kennedy QC to discuss domestic violence, as she has instrumental in getting this unacceptable behaviour on the political and public agendas. Baroness Kennedy has been spearheading two amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill that is currently before the House of Lords, firstly, allowing protections for self defence, and secondly around actions committed under duress for victims of domestic abuse. The response of the dental profession to patients who present with facial or dental injury arising from domestic violence has been poor. This may reflect the accessibility or effectiveness of DVA training and or the lack of clear referral pathways and specialist support services. It may also simply reflect the fact that many healthcare providers do not feel that this is their role. The role of the oral surgeon, like the dentist, is to identify and refer, rather than attempt solving the social problem. The new Bill will hopefully encourage professions to engage including our own.

If you want further information on how to identify and refer patients that you think may have experienced domestic violence then you could look at the paper I published last year together with Helena Kennedy. The incidence hugely increased during last 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions on movement, in the UK and globally, as acknowledged by the WHO.

[Coulthard P, Hutchison I, Bell JA, Coulthard ID, Kennedy H. COVID-19, Domestic Violence & Abuse, and Urgent Dental and Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery Care. BDJ 2020:228;923-926](#)

Kind regards,



Professor Paul Coulthard, BAOS President

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