

**LIFE'S LITTLE MYSTERIES**  
**Roger Matthews**

I'm sure I'm not alone in pondering obscure and quite probably unanswerable questions. Why is it, for example, that I am perfectly capable of burning a garlic baguette in the oven whilst leaving the butter inside still solid?

And how come it can take five or ten years of study to become a classically trained actor, whilst any minor TV 'celeb' can walk straight into a starring role?

And so it is that the musings turn eventually to dentistry, which is one of the only two subjects I can talk about, and hence don't get asked to many parties: why is it always the last patient before lunch who cancels ten minutes after they were due?

You must do it too, surely? It's always the private partial try-in, the one that the technician has slaved over to accomplish superb gingival anatomy, that gets trashed when the patient ("close *gently* please") gnashes down as if trying to crush a ball bearing. Oh, and the reception cash till is always 7p out when they reconcile the takings...

So, I wondered, why has no-one put all the answers together on the big questions we all have, and endlessly debate? The elephant in the room stuff.

Like why are we still, nearly four years on, with more dentists than ever before and more UDAs being commissioned *and* more money being poured into the system, only just clawing back to the 2006 levels of patient access?

Yes, I know, it's all coming good and 2010 will be the year of vindication for the reforms, but for an extra half a billion sterling (each year, mark you) and the combined manpower of hundreds of PCT managers *and* the combined planning power of all those DH administrators, you'd have to say that the initiative was hardly startling, let alone successful.

And why is it that when principal dentists' earnings seem to be forever heading skywards (cue angry and blustering articles in the self-appointed media guardians of righteousness), it still appears that a good third of the profession is failing to achieve their UDAs?

Come to think of it, while economic Armageddon is being put on hold for the benefit of the politicians, how come even more money is being thrown at yet another round of bureaucratic legal-ese purporting to be the Final Answer (also known as PDS Plus).

By the time that the requirements of public tendering, Pre-qualifying Questionnaires and Invitations to Participate in Dialogue have exhausted themselves, I would imagine that the current administration will be hoping against hope that it is not they who will be in the position of guaranteeing that "everyone who wants access to an NHS dentists will have it by March 2011 *at the latest*". At the latest? Clearly the Secretary of State is not satisfied with getting five million more occiputs on headrests in just fifteen months and is cranking up the pressure.

Sadly, those looking for vast change in the summer are not likely to get it in any meaningful sense. It took the Conservatives eleven years to get round to reforming dentistry and Labour took nine, so I'm really not holding my breath for radical developments.

Now, about those baguettes, is it the same as baked Alaska? Hmm.

[544 words]

**Notes to Editors:**

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Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.