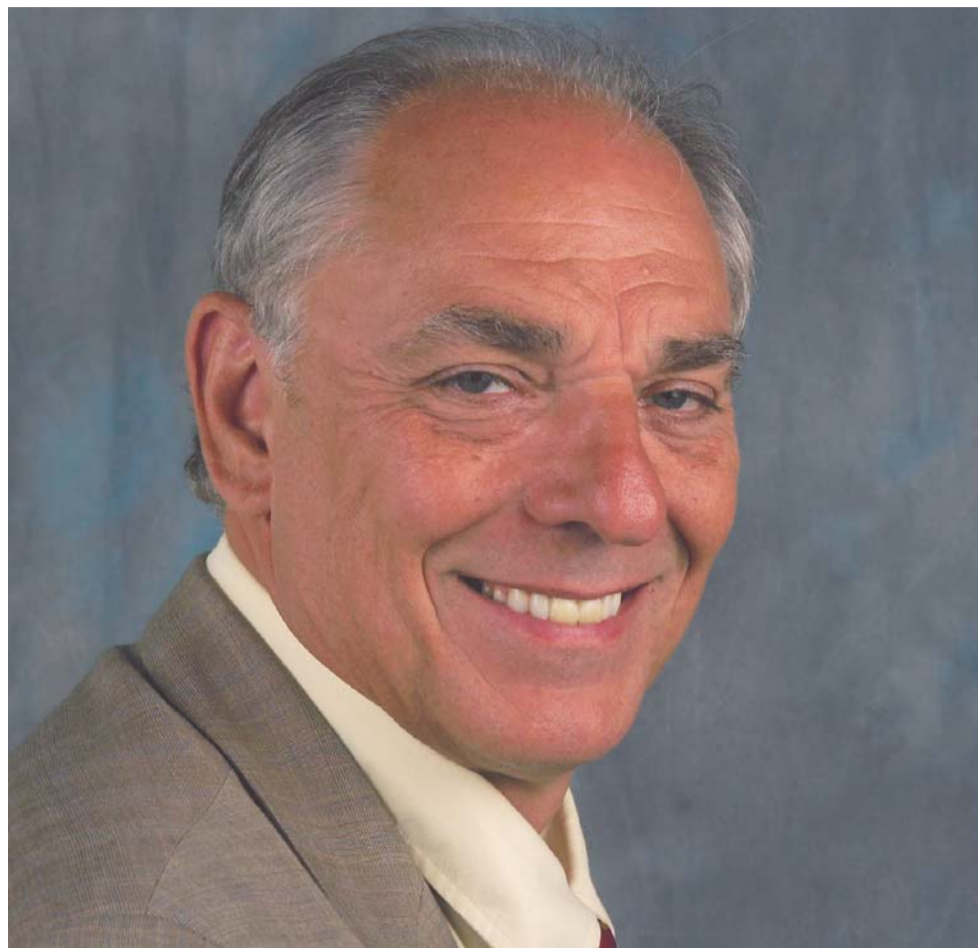


# Welcome to *Dental Care*



The majority of us have questions about dentists and dentistry but they can remain unanswered largely because we are just too afraid to ask them. So we have bravely quizzed Mike Mulcahy BChD LDSRCS MGDSRCS(Eng) FFGDP(UK). He is the Dean of the UK's Faculty of General Dental Practice which is part of the Royal College of Surgeons. It promotes high standards to improve the dental care delivered to patients.

**Q** I'm really nervous about going to a dentist, how can I overcome this?

**A** I sympathise. No one enjoys going to a dentist; not even dentists. Having someone working in your mouth is invasive and it can be uncomfortable. The solution is to find a practice you feel comfortable with. The dentist should be approachable, their team helpful, the waiting room calming, and the whole environment immaculately clean (the risk of infection is tiny, but evidence of a zealous attitude towards cleanliness and proper sterilisation is always a bonus when seeking reassurance).

**Q** How do I ensure that the dentist I choose is a good one?

**A** Most people use word of mouth but this may not necessarily be the best method. I suggest you check that the dentist has completed the Faculty's postgraduate qualifications. Look for the following letters: MFGDP(UK), FFGDP(UK) and MGDS. These indicate that, in addition to obtaining a basic compulsory dental degree, the holder has undertaken a further period of rigorous training. I also recommend that you look for any extra certificates, such as Investors in People, and whether they have won any industry awards.

**Q** Just how often should I visit him or her?

**A** This is a timely question, and not as obvious as you might think. Traditionally it was widely accepted that people ought to go every six months. Recently, however, this position has been reviewed and revised. NICE, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, in conjunction with other interested parties including the Faculty, looked at the research and considered the issues. It was concluded that there was no proof that six months was the optimum time. It was put forward that instead of sticking to this rather arbitrary figure individuals should be assessed for their own needs. So, someone would have a one-to-one consultation that took into account not just their dental history, but also their medical history, as well as their diet and their lifestyle and then based on that decide how to proceed. For some this may be every three months, for others, every 24 months. The new guidelines have been published and will be applied in the NHS next April.

**Q** Why should I see a dental hygienist?

**A** They can give you particular care and advice. They will scale and polish your

teeth and instruct you on how to keep them healthy. They will give you help on how to prevent gum disease, and other dental diseases.

It is important to recognise that dental hygienists play an important role in the practice and that they are properly trained professionals. They do a two year diploma consisting of both theoretical learning and practical experience.

**Q** In terms of treatments, is tooth bleaching safe and legal?

**A** The process of applying a bleach to whiten and brighten teeth is safe providing it is done with a dentist rather than with an at-home kit. These can go wrong. There is a European legislative problem which does need to be resolved but, to be sure, it has been widely practised by professionals without any negative effects. I have had it done myself, as has my wife and our children.

**Q** What about implants, are these safe and legal and can anyone do them?

**A** An implant, which involves fitting and permanently fixing a replacement tooth, is safe and is legal but not anyone can do it. Training is essential and that training does vary. Some courses run for a weekend. The Faculty's extends over two years and is the only one registered with the General Dental Council. For this reason we urge you go with a

dentist who has done our course - they will have DIP.Imp.Dent.RCS (Eng) after their name.

**Q** How do I seek other specialist treatment?

**A** You can find a specialist dentist yourself. The General Dental Council holds a list of them. You can therefore read down this and make your own selection. It is preferable though to speak to your own dentist. They will discuss your requirements and refer you to someone who can meet them.

**Q** Finally, why are there long waiting queues?

**A** Around 10 to 15 years ago cut backs were made in the number of dentists being trained, so much so that demand for dentists came to outstrip supply. The Government has taken two steps to try to rectify this problem. It has encouraged more students to enter the profession. As training takes at least five years there will still be some time before we have the benefit of their expertise. In the meantime it has been recruiting foreign dentists. Even though we now have an extra 1,000 working here in the UK in some areas that is still not enough.

The Faculty has developed a scheme for the delivery of specialised services outside the hospital setting and this is helping to provide quicker access.

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