

SUGAR SMART

CASE STUDY

Dental practice challenges patients – and staff – on sugar

Background

Bow Lane Dental is a private dental practice operating in the City of London for over 20 years. Founder and dentist James Goolnik was supportive of the SUGAR SMART campaign from its launch, and was the first dentist to register as a participant in the campaign. In June 2017, James and his colleagues ran a sugar reduction challenge programme to support both staff and patients to reduce their sugar consumption.

James was motivated by the stark statistics on oral health among British children. One quarter of all children entering primary school have tooth decay. This leads to poor quality of life and contributes to fear of dentists in these children, and costs the NHS over £35 million each year in extractions. According to Public Health England data published in April 2018, a child in England has a tooth removed in hospital every 10 minutes, due to preventable decay. But he was also motivated by unhealthy snack culture in the staff room of the dental practice.

Action on sugar

To motivate staff and patients to curb sugar consumption, the practice ran a 30-day sugar challenge, encouraging people to cut sugar intake down to below the recommended limit and share their experiences, both on the practice's Facebook page, and in person.

James explains, "As a dentist I see the harmful effects of sugar on teeth every day, and wanted to raise awareness of these effects. So I took on a 30 day sugar challenge to cut my sugar intake down to 6 teaspoons a day and encouraged others to join me."



Staff wore specially designed "I'm on a 30-day sugar challenge", which got patients asking about sugar reduction and motivated them to register to take part in the challenge. Staff handed out materials on improving oral health, as well as free stickers and apples for the children, and a link to the practice's Facebook page to share their sugar reduction experiences.

But that's not all: staff committed to sticking to healthy snacks in the office as well. The staff room was stocked with free fruit, plain yoghurt and nuts to make healthy snacking between patients more accessible. James felt that it was important to 'get one's house in order'. He said:

"Dental team members eat too much sugar, despite dealing first hand with the damage it does to teeth. I wanted to make it easier for our team to have healthier alternatives. If they have a 20 minute break between patients, it's too

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easy to grab a chocolate bar rather than look for something healthier that wouldn't lead to a sugar crash later in the day. Like any busy job, it is hard to find extra time for healthy shopping when unhealthy snacks are everywhere."

James and his staff found that parents the most receptive as they wanted to do their best for their children, to give their children a better start in life and educate them to make healthier choices. Staff received positive feedback from patients with stories of how patients had successfully cut out sugar and how parents stuck to rewarding children with non-sugary treats such as going to cinema, stickers, stationery etc.

James adds, "we believe you can have sugar, you just need to be aware of when you are having sugar (as it is hidden in so many foods and drinks) and in moderation - not every day."

Outcomes

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In addition to the sugar challenge in June, James, along with fellow dentists Richard O'Brien and Mark Vardon braved 12 miles of mud, sweat and no less than 24 obstacles to compete in the 2017 Tough Mudder competition, raising over £600 toward education materials and free toothbrushes. These were used by James in his visits to local schools and nurseries in the City of London, where he ran assemblies on sugar reduction and talked to the children about the importance of dental health.

