SOUND BITES WINTER 2006

This is the first of a series of articles written by our dentists about matters that we hope are both topical and of interest to you. This article considers the purpose of the routine dental check up, focussing on the part it has to play in the prevention of decay and disease.

A friend of mine recently had a routine dental examination and jokingly asked me afterwards: "What on earth is the meaning of all those numbers you relay to the nurse?!" He clearly found it nonsensical and I was immediately reminded of having similar thoughts when visiting my own dentist as a teenager. His pretty nurse may have been the real motivation for my visit but I was nonetheless curious!

As dental professionals we don't just examine your teeth but the health of your mouth generally, including your gums. The gums are the vital supporting structure to the teeth. Gum disease is very common and most adults show some signs. The first set of numbers that you are likely to hear is a record of the examination of the tightness of the gum around each individual tooth. These records enable us to build up a picture of your gum health over a period of time, which is essential if we are to provide with the right treatment for them in the future. If the teeth seem loose or there is a lot of bleeding from the gums we carry out a more detailed examination - again, we record what we find by using the number system.

Of course we also inspect each individual tooth. Every tooth in your mouth has a distinct number attached to it and each surface of the tooth has a unique name. The system is therefore a useful way of recording every aspect of the tooth, its filling and its condition, which can be recalled instantly at your next visit.

We also check your oral health generally during a routine examination. During this month we have promoted Oral Cancer Awareness Week. Oral cancer is a devastating disease and, although rare, statistics show that it is on the increase. One of the first things we do at a routine check up is examine your entire mouth for any early signs. We also inspect the soft tissues of your mouth as these can also carry signs of any other general diseases. We also look at your jaw to make sure that it works freely and is not showing signs of arthritis or other problems. This is particularly important for those people who grind their teeth heavily.

Changes in teeth and your oral health occur slowly and disease can be lurking even though no symptoms are suffered. The routine check up is therefore a useful way for us to build a picture of your oral health over a period time, which is vital to us being able to spot potential problems so that we can respond to your needs now and in the future.

M P Edgecombe
Practice Principal

ONGOING TRAINING

This year two of our nurses are training to become oral health educators. They have both just completed an exhibition each, one on Dental Erosion and the other on Sugars in the Diet. This will be followed up with in depth case studies of several patients– our thanks go to these patients for kindly agreeing to this.
They are then required to take an examination which consists of three separate parts. Once completed this will enable them to provide further health education to you, our patients, either on a one to one basis or in small groups.

May we take this opportunity to wish all our patients a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.