Prevention
The evidence summary is based on the original summary published in the *BDJ* (April 2010). It aims to identify and summarise UK studies that ask dentists what they consider prevention/preventative dentistry to involve in their practice and what preventative activities they undertake in their practice. It does not include detailed descriptions of the studies cited nor does it include information that was not presented in the literature.

The Curious about website encourages dental professionals to raise issues where a review of the available evidence would provide a useful resource for other dental professionals. Where there is a lack of evidence, the topic is considered for research and an award is made available.

These activities are sponsored by the Shirley Glasstone Hughes Fund, a restricted fund within the BDA Trust Fund. The focus of the fund is research into primary care dentistry and aims to generate a body of relevant research for practicing dentists.

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Key finding

- There is a lack of evidence relating to dentists’ perceptions of prevention and its application in practice.

Review question

This evidence summary was prepared in response to the following question: What do dentists mean by ‘prevention’ when applied to what they do in their practices?

Key term

Preventive dentistry:
The branch of dentistry concerned with the prevention of disease and the maintenance and promotion of oral health. (MEDLINE MeSH term)

The case for action

Despite being often preventable oral disease remains a significant problem in the UK with a large proportion of the population being affected at some stage in their lives. Dental disease has a significant impact on both society and the individual and is, with regards to periodontitis, associated with an increased risk of non-oral illnesses including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and respiratory disease.

The dental profession has always advocated prevention and while most dentists believe that prevention forms part of their work preventative practice can be regarded as problematic. Recent government reform of dental services envisages dentistry as an integral part of the wider primary care network, with promotion of preventive practice being a priority. Emerging NHS primary care trust commissioning arrangements include oral health improvement and prevention as part of dental services commissioning and published evidence-based approaches to preventive dentistry support the delivery of a more preventive approach to tackling dental disease in primary dental care.

The evidence

Nine studies were found indicating a number of dimensions along which dentists’ perceptions of prevention can fall (Figure 1). The information has been grouped below according to how dentists see prevention and what preventative measures they take.

How dentists see prevention

Most dentists regard aspects of prevention to be

- Part of their professional work/philosophy/responsibility.
- A source of job satisfaction.
- Of value to the practice image.
- A marker of quality of care.

Dentists hold differing views on preventive activities with some being ‘health-focused’ and others ‘disease-focused’. Health focused dentists adopt a holistic view of patients, emphasising prevention rather than treatment and feel that their role involves looking after people’s general health. Disease-focused dentists support a view that any health promotion activity should be centred on the mouth and place emphasis on curative treatments.

Further differences in perspective cover

- The relevance to dentistry of specific public health interventions, for example smoking cessation or blood pressure monitoring.
- The difficulties that might arise in the dentist-patient relationship and affect business.
Preventative measures dentists take
Most preventive advice is provided on a one-to-one basis, mainly at the chairside though a small proportion of dentists have dedicated areas.\(^{(7,14)}\) The advice provided to patients varies as does the quantity and proportion of working time spent undertaking preventative activities.\(^{(7,14)}\)

Posters and/or leaflets are popular aids\(^{(7,15)}\) and dentists cover a range of preventative topics,\(^{(7,12-14,16,17)}\) even if the scientific rationale is unclear, with some topics being more popular than others.\(^{(13)}\) Topics identified are shown below:

- fissure sealants
- topical fluorides
- interdental cleaning/oral hygiene
- smoking prevention/cessation
- general messages such as the preventability of most oral disease
- oral cancer
- gumshields
- drug use
- alcohol consumption
- skin cancer prevention
- physical activity
- diet.

Some practitioners take a team approach to preventative dentistry and delegate activities to dental care professionals within the practice.\(^{(12)}\) The rationale behind this being that delegation is cost and time effective. Though there is a broad variation in the level of use of dental hygienists dentists employing hygienists appear to be more aware of prevention.\(^{(13,14)}\)

Methods
Search strategy
The following resources were searched:

- Ovid MEDLINE
- Centre for Evidence Based Dentistry
- Cochrane Oral Health Group
- American Dental Association
- National Library for Public Health
- Science Direct
- ASSIA (CSA)
- Web of Science
- EBSCO
- SwetsWise.

Initial search terms for Ovid MEDLINE were: Preventive dentistry; dentists’ practice patterns; (general practice, dental, Great Britain); Preventive dentistry, definition; Preventive dentistry and limited to reviews 1999-2010, general articles 2005-2010 and Great Britain. Studies were included if they were:

- Studies asking dentists directly what they consider prevention/preventive dentistry to involve in their practice, or what preventive activities these dentists undertake within their practice.
- Surveys of dentists which include open questions about what preventive activities they do in their practices.
- Surveys of dentists which include questions about oral/dental health education/promotion as a sub-set of prevention.

Searches are current as of December 2009.

Results
Nine studies were located.
References