The Peninsula Dental School has been awarded £500,000 by the University of Plymouth to spend on finding out how virtual reality can be used to tackle dental phobia.

The dental school plans to spend the money on three areas of research:

- The first area of research will consider the issue of virtual reality and psychological approaches that could be used to tackle dental anxiety both before and during treatment.

- The second area of research will examine the extent to which virtual reality and psychological approaches could be used to tackle dental anxiety both before and during treatment.

- The third area of research will consider nanotechnology, toxicology and dentistry. Nano-powders and nanotechnology are used widely in the latest generation of dental filling materials. They are also found in the surfaces of implants, dental tissue engineering and toothpastes and their use has been driven by the demand for materials that are aesthetically pleasing and the desire to move away from a reliance on mercury containing materials such as dental amalgam.

However, there is a fear that engineered nanomaterials may act as endocrine disruptors, could be genotoxic (which means that they could affect the integrity of cells which in some cases are mutagenic or carcinogenic) and may prove to be toxic to the wider environment.

This area of research will consider the issues in conjunction with the European Centre for the Environment and Human Health, which is part of the Peninsula Medical School.

Professor Wendy Purcell, vice-chancellor and chief executive of the University of Plymouth, commented: “Our ongoing support stands testament to the excellence of the quality of the School’s research and the very real benefits that it affords the health and wealth of the city and the region, including helping to enable the dental treatment of up to 500 NHS patients a day at our training sites in Plymouth.

“The University is proud to be founding partner of the School and through this investment, continue to play an important part in funding vital research.”

Endodontic specialist to speak at May conference

International endodontic specialist Dr Julian Webber will be among the speakers lecturing at this year’s 2010 Clinical Innovations Conference.

The Clinical Innovations Conference hosted by education and training provider, Smile-on, will be held May 7-8 at the Royal College of Physicians, Regent’s Park, London.

Dr Webber’s contribution to the conference, which is now in its seventh successful year, will be a lecture on the Management of Endodontic Failure.

The lecture will focus on common reasons for endodontic failure, and come up with suggestions for addressing these issues - helping practitioners ensure successful outcomes with tooth retention as the primary goal.

Dr Webber is internationally renowned for his knowledge and understanding of endodontic procedures, and has lectured around the world.

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Editorial comment

Always look on the bright side of life

It seems that the doom and gloom that has beset the country is slowly beginning to lift. No, I'm not talking about that bastion of British whinging - the weather, we'll need at least until May for that - rather the economic climate. Figures released by the Office of National Statistics has shown that the economy grew by 0.1 per cent in the last quarter of 2009. While it's not quite time to run about the streets cheering, this does mean that it may be time to quietly plan for more optimistic times ahead.

There has been more positive news in the profession as well - half a million pounds of funding into the use of virtual reality and nanotechnology in dentistry given to the Peninsula Dental School; a new dental school in Scotland; new dental practices opening in the Isle of Wight - it looks like a new year and a new decade has seen the turnaround into a more positive outlook, and long may it continue.

Also looking into the future, careers in dentistry are taking centre stage with the holding of a live Q&A session discussing careers in dentistry and the upcoming Career Opportunities in UK Dentistry conference next week.

Don't forget to visit my fundraising site - www.justgiving.com/bukumbibound - to find out more about how I will be supporting the work of Bridge2Aid in the Tanzanian village of Bukumbi and to help by donating.

Guardian holds live Q&A on dentistry career

The Guardian Newspaper website held a live Q&A on careers in dentistry.

The session was hosted by the Careers section of the website as part of its National Occupation Shortage List Series.

Experts on the careers panel taking questions and giving advice included practising dentists and an orthodontic consultant from the British Orthodontic Society.

Scott Deacon, lead consultant orthodontist for cleft patients in the South West of England appeared on behalf of the British Orthodontic Society.

Mr Deacon is training programme director for Specialist Orthodontic Training in the South West and course director of the postgraduate orthodontic programme at the University of Bristol.

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Civil litigation report welcomed

Unsuccessful defendants should no longer have to pay ‘After the Event Insurance’ and success fees, according to proposals in a final report into civil litigation costs.

The Medical Defence Union (MDU), has welcomed the Right Honourable Lord Justice Jackson’s final report into civil litigation costs and claims it will improve the civil litigation process for claimants and defendants.

MDU head of claims, Jill Harding, said: “In our response to Lord Justice Jackson’s 2009 review of claims costs, we suggested a number of reforms which we believe are necessary to restore fairness and balance to the civil litigation procedures.

“We are delighted that many of these seem to have been proposed.

“We are particularly pleased that he has recommended unsuccessful defendants no longer have to pay for ‘After the Event Insurance’ and success fees which have contributed to the disproportionate costs faced by defendants, including MDU doctors and dentists.

Lord Justice Jackson in his report accepted the need for wholesale reform of costs management including the time spent on a case and solicitors’ hourly rates.

The report also recommends that specialist judges manage and try clinical negligence cases to ensure better cost and case management.

Dental Protection communications manager David Croser commented: “Dental Protection welcomes the final report of Lord Justice Jackson on civil litigation costs. Lord Justice Jackson consulted widely during the consultation process and DPL together with its medical colleagues within MPS made two submissions and also provided data to the review team; we believe that the report represents a fair and balanced review of costs. The report includes specific recommendations for clinical negligence litigation including removing the obligation that the losing defendant must pay the claimant’s after-the-event insurance cover and success fees. Although DPL takes a firm stance when negotiating costs after settlement of a claim, these additional costs can sometimes double the costs which must be paid and this is necessarily reflected in the subscriptions charged to dental members.

“We would like to see the government bring forward legislation to implement these important changes. It would be a real shame if the momentum for reform of civil litigation costs was lost in the run up to a general election.”

‘Money-making’ dentist struck off

A dentist who conned patients out of thousands of pounds for fillings they didn’t need has been struck off by the General Dental Council.

Dr Constantine Saridakis, who worked at the Birchwood Dental Practice in Lincoln, was found guilty of 10 incidents of giving unnecessary treatment between May 2007 and March 2008.

In a number of cases, he recommended multiple fillings on patients who actually had no tooth decay. His partner gave a second opinion on some of the cases, often finding no decay.

When confronted, Dr Saridakis allegedly said: “Sometimes I’m preventative, and sometimes I’m in a money-making mood.”

Dr Saridakis was suspended from NHS Lincolnshire’s dental performers list last April. However, he still treated two children then backdated the paperwork.

Two dental nurses voiced their suspicions when patients with healthy teeth were informed they needed fillings.