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Protecting our patients: safeguarding revisited**Elizabeth Offen***The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust, UK*

Safeguarding is the act of protecting vulnerable patients. This responsibility is shared by the entire dental team. During the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of abuse have risen. 59% of abused children experience orofacial trauma therefore, dental care professionals are well positioned to detect potential signs of abuse. This poster aims to refocus our attention on the topic of safeguarding, and refresh our knowledge on spotting the signs of abuse and how to respond. Abuse can take multiple forms: neglect, modern slavery, physical, domestic, emotional, sexual, financial, discriminatory, or organisational abuse. Abuse has long term consequences on the victim, which may include delayed development, mental health issues and increased risk of dangerous behaviour. It is well acknowledged in the literature that dental care practitioners are aware of their responsibility to safeguard vulnerable patients. However, multiple barriers to referral exist. Studies demonstrate that only 8% of safeguarding signs witnessed by dentists are reported. A review of the literature found barriers to include uncertainty over the findings, fear of implications for the child, family or dental team, and time pressures. This poster provides a structured framework to prepare your dental practice for managing safeguarding concerns. By focusing on preparation and a supportive environment, we can reduce the influence of these barriers. Although raising concerns can be stressful, there are multiple resources available to support the dental team. The key focus must be the wellbeing and safety of the vulnerable patient. Appropriate referrals will help the patient and family access the support they need.

Biography

Dr Elizabeth Offen graduated from the University of Sheffield, UK in 2019 with a Bachelor of Dental Surgery with honours (BDS (Hons)). Following this, she completed a year of Foundation Training in general dental practice. During this time, she obtained a Diploma of Membership of the Faculty of Dental Surgery (MFDS RCS Eng). Dr Offen now works in a hospital maxillofacial department as a Dental Core Trainee.