



Lord Beaverbrook's toothache *

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Functional pain accounts for a significant proportion of patient attendances in all the medical and surgical specialties, and dentistry is no exception (1). Indeed, the majority of attendances at an oral medicine clinic are for functional facial pain which may manifest as temporomandibular dysfunction, atypical facial pain or oral dysesthesia.

Atypical facial pain, in particular, mimics toothache and is usually a diagnosis of exclusion after prolonged dental intervention. The problem is exacerbated by dental treatment rather than relieved by it. The aetiology of functional facial pain is complex but is aggravated by stress-induced anxiety and adverse life events, and is often associated with depressive illness. Indeed, its management relies heavily on psychotropic therapy. Successful treatment may be followed by recurrence in response to further dental intervention or further adverse life events.

Lord Beaverbrook's pivotal role in his capacity as adviser to King Edward VIII in the abdication of the King (2), may have been significantly interfered with by the continuing problems related to toothache. However there is significant evidence in his book entitled 'The Abdication of King Edward VIII', edited by A J P Taylor, that his toothache was atypical in nature.

"It was on Tuesday, 13th October. ... that the King telephoned me ... I was cursed with toothache and heavily engaged with my dentist during the next two days. On Friday, 16th October, I went to the Palace". A J P Taylor comments on this statement by Lord Beaverbrook by writing that "There is no record in the engagement book of any visit by Beaverbrook to the dentist between the 12th and 16th October. The book however contains this entry for the 15th October: 5.30pm. Mr. Ernest Simpson".

Lord Beaverbrook further states: "It was difficult to describe the loneliness that descended upon me... I was never at rest by night or by day... Now there was silence, total and unbroken... the abrupt change to complete inactivity and isolation had a physical reaction. My toothache returned." He goes on to say: "I had been suffering from toothache when I was first brought into the affair but the engrossing nature of the struggle and the immense demands it made, both physical and mental, had banished 'the hell of all diseases' from my mind. Now it came back to be the sole and unwelcome companion of solitude. At last I paid my return visit to the dentist Mr. Campbell. By that time, the drama was over. Baldwin had already spoken and the King was preparing to speak for the first and last time. While I was in the dentist chair, the assistant came in to say that I was being asked to receive a telephone call from Buckingham Palace. I was confused and uncertain when I heard this summons, and I replied 'Buckingham Palace - no more'. The fight had been lost and the most stubborn enemy of our plan for a new United British Empire had scored his greatest triumph. Mr. Campbell took note of my hesitancy, and he laid his instruments down. He was surprised that a call from the Palace on that day of all days should not have brought me instantly to my feet, in haste to answer. I was in no hurry, but I shuffled to the telephone and there had a brief exchange of good wishes. To a brave spirit even more tormented than was depressed I spoke in cheerful terms. Then back to the dentist chair."

These quotes from Lord Beaverbrook's text provide valuable insight into the association he realised between his toothache and the political pressures that were being placed upon him. It is surprising that there are not more examples of the pressures among our political leaders being somatised and presenting to our profession.

(1) Magni G, et al. Chronic musculoskeletal pain and depressive symptoms in the general population. An analysis of the 1st National Health and Nutrition Survey Data. *Pain* 1990; 43: 299-307.

(2) Beaverbrook MA. *The Abdication of King Edward VIII*: by Lord Beaverbrook edited by A J P Taylor. H Hamilton, London, 1966.

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