

Dentists, Contributions to Society

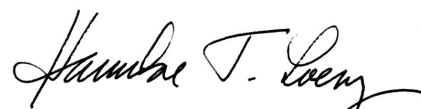
Dentistry has often been portrayed in a negative manner by comedians, comics and in film in a negative manner and ignoring the many contributions to society by dentists in human and social values. These contributions include Wells, Morton and many others. Among them is Edwin Saunders of London, England, a dentist to Queen Victoria and her family. Saunders, was born in 1814 in London at a time when dental education and organized dentistry was just about to develop in the US in other parts of the world. He was one of the first to call attention to the influence dentistry could have in other areas outside dentistry.

Saunders was a dentist at the Blenheim Street Infirmary and Free Dispensary and in 1839 founded, at his own expense, a dental dispensary to provide treatment for poor people.¹ In 1886 Saunders became president of the British Dental Association. He was knighted in 1883. Saunders was concerned with the non-compliance of the British Factory Act issued in England in 1833. This act regulated child labor in factories. The law stated that children under the age of 9 could not be employed in silk mills and no children below age 13 should be employed for more than 48 hours per week or nine hours a day. Children could not remain in the factory during meal times.

While inspectors were appointed to enforce compliance, the enforcement was a difficult task at best since parents and children were not willing to cooperate and fraud was rampant. After all, children were bringing in badly needed money and a strong child could appear older especially when birth certificates were not easily available. Saunders had the idea of checking the development of children's teeth in children attending public schools around London and then used the data for construction of tables of tooth eruption data was made available as a means of checking the age of child workers. The age of young children could then be evaluated, the law could be followed and fraud could be reduced. This is an example of a contribution by dentistry in reaching the aims of society in an area outside dentistry. There are many others. Let us hope that the media will see the important role dentistry plays in society.

REFERENCE

1. Gelbier, S. Dental pillars of society. *Dent. Hist. Sp.* Issue #46, 2007 pg 6-8.



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