

The National Fluoride Information Centre (NFIC)

Annual Report 2007

Welcome from the Director



Having taken on the role of Director of the National Fluoride Information Centre (NFIC) following Professor Blinkhorn's retirement, 2007 was an eventful and exciting year for both NFIC and myself and I look forward to the continued challenges and opportunities that 2008 brings.

As a national advice centre, 2007 saw us identifying an additional key audience and further expanding our remit and work programme to include information provision for dental and healthcare professionals, as well as the general public.

By diversifying our work programme to meet the information needs of this key audience, a one-day meeting was organised following requests on how to undertake economic and technical evaluations of water fluoridation schemes.

To further ensure the relevance of the information we were providing to this group, it was decided a new website was needed to reflect the change to our future work programme.

Whilst www.fluorideinformation.com has been hugely successful with the general public, if we are to be as successful in providing information to dental and healthcare professionals, then a new site is needed. Therefore 2007 was a year of consolidation and of identifying new directions.

Our information leaflets continued to be widely distributed by dental and healthcare professionals who reported their ongoing success with the public, and a number of new leaflets were produced to accompany these.

In generating the information, we have been fortunate in having a number of independent experts to provide us with the most accurate and up-to-date information available.

We were also granted additional funding to enable us to continue providing information and encourage research in all areas of fluoride use.

Providing accessible, independent information to the general public and dental and health professionals remains at the heart of the NFIC work programme in 2008.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Davies' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Robin Davies
Director, National Fluoride Information Centre (NFIC)

Overview of 2007

In 2007 NFIC identified and responded to a need for information from dental and healthcare professionals by diversifying its work programme to include producing reports and papers for professionals on a number of fluoride issues.

In order to target this group most effectively, rather than producing one-off pieces of work for individuals and organisations on an ad-hoc basis, it was decided this was a priority audience who needed accessible and relevant information which met their needs, but which was different to those of the general public.

Work was begun to raise awareness of NFIC amongst this group and a number of activities and events were organised specifically to meet their needs. A one day meeting for NHS employees was held, an introductory guide to undertaking an economic and technical evaluation of water fluoridation schemes produced, along with briefing sheets on different fluoride uses and articles for the relevant media informing them of the new NFIC work programme.

Throughout the year NFIC maintained its reputation for providing relevant and topical information to the general public through the continued production and dissemination of information leaflets and development of the web content.

Communication with key NFIC audiences was achieved in a number of ways:

'The Economic and Technical Aspects of Water Fluoridation – An Interactive Workshop'

To raise the NFIC profile amongst dental and healthcare professionals, whilst simultaneously meeting the information needs of this group, a one day meeting was organised, exploring the economic and technical considerations of water fluoridation schemes.

Following delegate feedback from the first national conference, combined with information requests received throughout the year, the event provided an opportunity for NHS employees to meet experts and colleagues to gain an understanding of how to approach this subject.

An independent dental academic was commissioned to produce an accessible guide for NHS employees which outlined the key steps involved in undertaking an evaluation and which was distributed at the meeting.

Delegate feedback was extremely positive, indicating the event had provided a useful starting point to begin understanding how this area of work could be approached.

The feedback also highlighted the additional support and information required by this group which will be useful in determining the nature and direction of future work. Some delegate comments are shown at the end of the annual report.

A copy of the guide produced for the event is available to download from the website www.fluorideinformation.com.

Overview of 2007

Public Information Leaflets

Our public information leaflets continued to be widely used by healthcare professionals throughout 2007.

Water Fluoridation & Children and Water Fluoridation & Adults were sent to every UK NHS General Dental Practitioner and distributed nationally to libraries and other public health centres, with subsequent copies requested by dental surgeries and health promoters. They also continued to be widely used by the Isle of Man Public Health Directorate during their public consultation on water fluoridation, with feedback reporting their popularity with the general public.

Building on their success, additional leaflets were produced advising parents on how to keep their children's teeth healthy. This followed a large volume of calls for information on this subject from dental and healthcare professionals, as well as members of the public. Additional leaflets on a similar theme are planned for 2008.

All the leaflets are available free of charge and can be downloaded from the website.

Samples of comments we received on the leaflets are at the end of the report.

Profile Raising

Following the identification of healthcare and dental professionals as a key audience, work was undertaken to proactively raise NFIC's profile amongst this group.

Along with organising specific events for this audience, media relations work to secure a visible presence in the trade and specialist media was also undertaken. Press releases were featured in the dental and healthcare press and subsequently, the number of requests for additional articles on different aspects of NFIC's work increased from both online and print outlets. It is anticipated this will continue as NFIC's profile increases. Media relations will continue to be a large part of NFIC's work into 2008 and beyond.

We will also have a presence at relevant conferences and events, beginning with the BASCD Conference 2008. This will enable us to reach a wider target audience of dental professionals.

Website Analysis

The website analysis package has enabled us to access detailed statistics for 2007 which show the volume of visitor traffic and the areas being accessed. This information has been used to help develop the site by enabling us to identify the most frequently accessed areas and subsequently revise the information within each section. Overall, we saw a marked increase in traffic over the last year.

The website continues to be our primary communication tool and we are continually revising the content in line with user needs. This year, new sections were added and existing areas updated to reflect the most current research.

A detailed analysis of statistics is available in the User Feedback & Statistics section.

Overview of 2007

Feedback

2007 was another successful year for NFIC as our work programme diversified in order to provide information to a wider audience. At the heart of all NFIC's work, however, remains an awareness of the needs of service users, whether a member of the public or a healthcare professional. Feedback we received shows we are moving in the right direction.

Feedback on the information leaflets:

'Thank you for the leaflets, they have been really useful – can I have some more please!'

Dental Nurse, Kent.

'Could I have more of the leaflets please as they are very popular with the patients and other colleagues – they are a great idea and please produce more.'

Dental Nurse, London.

'I am very impressed by the quality of the information leaflets, and the Water Fluoridation and Children one is proving extremely popular.'

Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Isle of Man.

Delegate feedback from 'The Economic and Technical Aspects of Water Fluoridation – An Interactive Workshop':

'This was a superb event, well worth getting up at 4am for!'

'A really useful session which has given me lots of food for thought – can we have another one next year?'

Feedback from our email enquiries:

'Thank you for the speedy reply and for such detail.'

'Many thanks for your reply, the information is really useful, just what I wanted.'

'The leaflets are brilliant - they say everything we want and are spot on!'

Dental Health Educator, Maidstone.



Plans for 2008

2008 will see NFIC consolidating its position as England's source of independent fluoride information by continuing to provide relevant and objective information to the public and health professionals and ensuring that it reaches the widest possible audience. This will be achieved in a number of ways:

New Website

A new website will be launched in 2008 to accommodate the growing needs of our different user groups. The site will provide information useful to both the general public and professionals and will be extensively peer reviewed by a professional and lay audience prior to being launched. Work has also begun on securing the Plain English Crystal Mark to ensure all material available to the general public is as accessible as possible.

National Conference

A national conference to address some of the key issues around inequalities in oral health and the effectiveness of different fluoride delivery systems to reduce them will be held for healthcare and dental professionals. The event will be tailored to meet the needs of a key part of the NFIC audience, thus reinforcing our position as the objective authority on fluoride advice and information. Primarily targeting healthcare professionals, the conference will provide an opportunity for information sharing on the most up-to-date research on fluoride use available.

Subsequent meetings and events will also be organised, dependent on the information requests we receive, throughout the year.

Website Audit

After an initial six month period we will review the new website to see if it is successfully providing information to both professionals and the public.

Consultations with a number of individuals will be ongoing and the feedback assessed to identify any areas that would benefit from improvement and development.

Peer Review

To ensure that we are producing relevant, audience appropriate material throughout 2008, we will seek regular feedback and communication with all user groups.

We currently have an independent peer review group of professionals working in the healthcare and dental fields and this will be augmented to include consultation with a number of lay individuals.

Information Leaflets

Following the success of the initial leaflets, 2008 will see us adding to our collection by generating additional public information leaflets. These will be peer reviewed to ensure they are as effective as possible.



Website - Feedback and Statistics

Since the website www.fluorideinformation.com went live in May 2005, user statistics have been tracked on a daily basis. These have been instrumental in showing a steady growth in visitor numbers and allowing us to identify areas of the site which are popular, as well as those which are not, which will help us to develop and improve.

In May 2007 we began to use a detailed analytics package which reflects more accurately the numbers of visitors specifically using the website. However, the figures do not include crawlers, or the numbers of visits which last less than a certain time, which means we can filter out anyone not actually using the site.

Therefore, whilst providing a more accurate account of the number of web users, it has meant comparisons with last year's figures are not valid because of the different way the figures are captured.

Although it is not now possible to compare like for like periods in 2007 / 08 with those in 2006, the new data being generated gives a more accurate count of actual users, the time they spend on the website and the number of pages they view. Where it is possible to compare like for like, for example January 2007 with January 2008, it can be seen that not only have visitors continued to increase, but they are also accessing more pages and spending longer viewing the web content.

User Statistics 2007 - An Overview

From 1 January – 31 December 2007, the site had 5662 visitors who accessed the site from over 70 countries worldwide, with the majority coming from the UK (80%), the USA (10%) and Australia (2%). Of this number, almost 60% were new. This shows that awareness of the site is increasing and that there is a large audience in the UK who are looking for information on fluorides and fluoridation.

For this time period, 52% of users accessed the site directly through the URL, highlighting an awareness of the website and its simple but effective address. A further 26% of visitors came via Google and, of those using a search engine, 45% found the site after entering 'fluoride' as their search term, with 'fluoride information' directing an additional 10%.

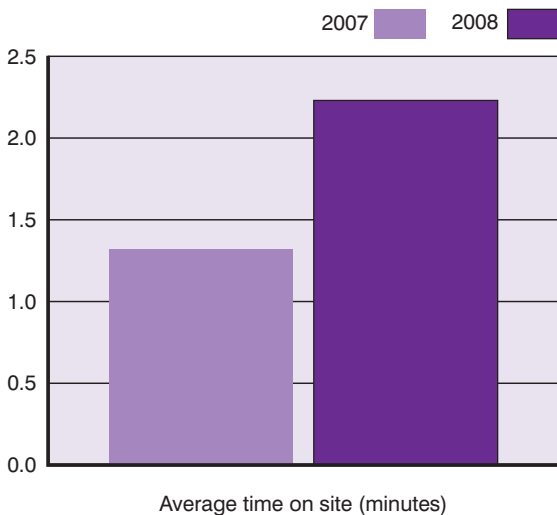
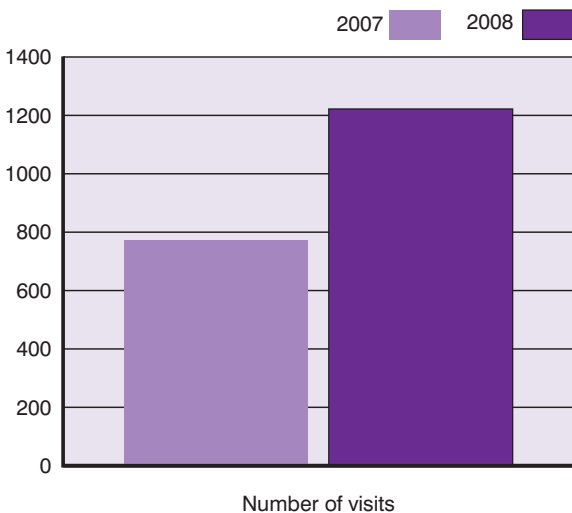
On average, visitors spent around two minutes viewing just over two pages per visit, an indication that the site is easy to access and that much of the information is available within a couple of mouse clicks from the welcome page on a limited number of pages. This reduces the time spent searching on the site and is an important factor when trying to publicise information. By increasing the content we hope to increase the time visitors spend on the website without losing the ease of access or quick availability of content.

Comparison of Statistics

01 January 2007 - 17 February 2007

01 January 2008 - 17 February 2008

In comparing two similar periods it can be seen that both visitor numbers and the time spent on the site has increased.



For the period 01/01 – 17/02/2007 there were 771 visits, of which 81% were from the UK, with a further 12% from the USA. On average, people spent around a minute and a half on the website, looking at two pages per visit.

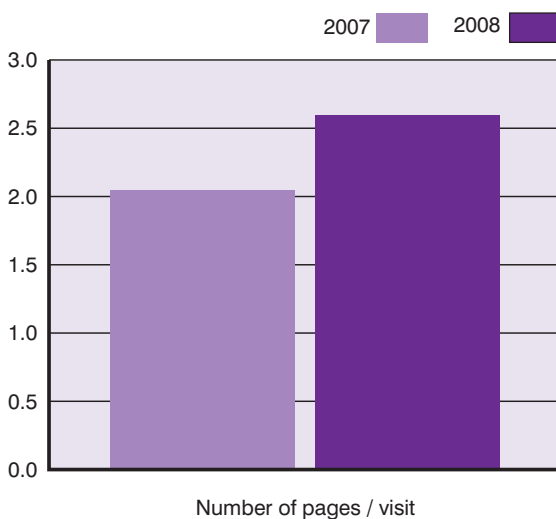
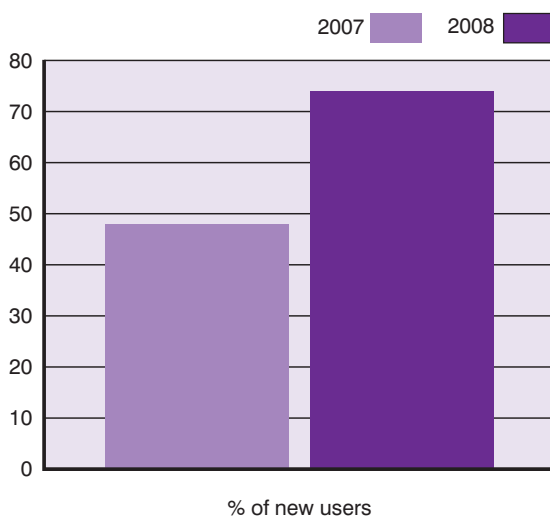
Just under half of all visitors (48%) were new which, whilst indicating that awareness of the site is increasing, also highlights that 52% of all visitors actually make one or more return visits, demonstrating that the regularly updated content is seen as attractive and interesting enough to encourage return visits.

Comparison of Statistics

For the same period in 2008, the site received 1,222 visits, which represents an increase of 37%. Of these visitors, 85% were from the UK, with much of the remainder being made up of people from USA (6%), India (2%) and Australia (1.2%). That the majority of users are from England highlights the site has successfully positioned itself as England's source of information, yet it is also viewed by an international audience.

Of these users, 74% were new to the site, an increase which reflects the growing awareness of the website and the centre amongst the public and dental and healthcare professionals.

The average time spent on the site has also increased by almost a minute, with an average of 2.6 pages viewed on each occasion. This demonstrates that users are staying on the website for longer periods, perhaps due to the increase in new material which is frequently added.



Popular Pages

The most popular pages are:

Who we are - Press Releases

Find Your Water Company

Fluoridated Water – How many people drink fluoridated water?

Fluoride Toothpaste - Fluoride concentrations in toothpastes.

Plans for 2008

It is anticipated that 2008 will see a further increase in visitors to the website following the launch of the new site in May 2008.

Whilst remaining our key communication tool for interacting with the general public, the website will also be targeted at health and dental professionals. The new site will have clearly delineated public/professional access and this distinction should lead to an increase in both time spent on the site and the number of pages viewed. The website will be continually reviewed to ensure it offers the most up-to-date and detailed information available.

Following the success of our initial conference in January 2007 we will also be organising another one. Targeted again at a professional audience, the conference will look at a key debate or issue relating to fluoride use and seek to be as inclusive and relevant as possible to ensure that we are sharing information with the widest of audiences.

To also help raise the profile of NFIC amongst a professional audience, we will identify relevant conferences and events nationwide which we can attend to promote the services we offer and speak with professionals about how they think we can best provide them with the information they need.

We will continue to promote the information leaflets as a useful resource for both the general public and healthcare and dental professionals and seek to build on this by identifying gaps in the current literature on fluorides and fluoridation and attempt meet this by producing additional material which is both relevant and engaging.

Throughout 2008 we will continue to work closely with a number of different stakeholders to seek their feedback and will build these comments into our future work programme.

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