What is next?

As 2018 comes to a close, we should take a moment to appreciate all of the incredible advances in technology and new products that have been introduced during the year. Regardless of which area of dentistry is considered the industry continues to innovate, clinicians continue to push the envelope, and hopefully these advances will translate to improved care for our patients. 2019 will bring us many additional surprises at the upcoming International Dental Show (IDS) in Cologne, Germany, always the focus for new product introductions and the world’s premier venue to showcase products related to all phases of dentistry. What is there to look forward to? Plenty.

It has become crystal clear that dentistry has been slowly moving from the analogue to the digital universe. Intraoral radiographs are no longer processed film with chemicals in a darkroom as digital sensors and computer software have provided an interactive medium for quicker access to images with enhanced diagnostic tools. Images that exist on the computer screen can be enlarged, adjusted for clarity, archived easily, printed or e-mailed with a few keystrokes. Each year the sensor technology continues to evolve to become the industry standard, yet digital radiography has not reached 100% saturation with dental offices around the world. What’s next?

Digital radiography has further expanded to include cone beam computed tomography which has become an essential diagnostic tool for dental implants, oral surgery, orthodontics, endodontics, and airway analysis. Computers continue to gain faster and faster hardware processors with more powerful graphics cards pushing shrinking pixels on higher-resolution monitors, therefore, providing clinicians with increased ability to visualise individual patient anatomical presentations.

Additionally, interactive software applications are constantly undergoing upgrades with advanced tools for both clinicians and dental laboratory technicians. However, as we all know the ultimate goal for our patients is to maintain good oral health, function, and aesthetic restorations. To that end, one of the major catalysts for the growth of digital dentistry has been the intraoral scanner. The ability to move from the analogue impression to a digital impression for a tooth preparation or to capture the position of an implant has transformed the restorative protocols and workflows for the present and the future. Virtual teeth can be designed on a tablet computer or a smart phone. Perhaps it is the merging of these technologies that has truly provided new levels of accuracy for the diagnostic, surgical, and restorative phases of dentistry.

A second major catalyst that has caught our industry by storm is the availability of low cost, accurate, 3-D printers that can take our ideas, our virtual designs, our virtual treatment plans, and bring them to a physical model that we can hold in our hands. Our world is changing rapidly...dentistry is forever evolving—and the ultimate beneficiary are the patients we serve. Let’s all look forward to “what’s next” in the coming year!

Happy Holidays to all!

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