When my son Timo was born, late one evening in June this year, we had to wait a few more seconds before we could finally hold our precious little gift in our arms. Shortly before his birth, my girlfriend and I decided to store stem cells collected from his umbilical cord blood. The body of a newborn contains innumerable stem cells that are able to prevent, regrow and regenerate damaged tissue. When speaking to doctors, I do not have to explain the vast medical benefits that stem cells have. However, while speaking to dentists, I would like to explain why we spent a good sum of money for something we will probably, and hopefully, never use. I do not want my son to ever experience any disease. I want him to avoid what can and cannot be cured. And I want my son to never experience caries, periodontitis or tooth loss.

In the same way that stem cells can potentially treat cardiovascular diseases, hematopoietic diseases, and Type 1 diabetes, periodontal pathogens correspond with exactly the same illnesses. Oral science has advanced to such a degree that we have a good understanding of biofilm, caries and periodontal diseases. Yet, while dentists have all the tools and knowledge necessary to prevent disease, they’ve remained the same designers, architects and mechanics as 50 years ago. The dental industry has developed solutions for permanent sub- and supragingival plaque removal, yet the communication with and motivation of the patient remain absent or insufficient.

The authors of this magazine agree that prevention needs to become an integral part of every dental practice. They also agree that dentists should provide general healthcare for their patients and see them multiple times per year for prophylactic treatment and saliva or blood tests. Ideally, they should also refer patients to other doctors and know the referring cardiologist, diabetologist or gynaecologist. Dentists would then not be considered dental artists, but rather doctors of oral health. None of this will be possible without changing the patient’s perspective of dentistry and oral health through education, motivation and repetition.

In other words, the best medication you can prescribe (to your patient and your team) is education.

The world of dentistry has come a long way. Restorative dentistry has been embraced, while digital implantology has paved the way for long-lasting and affordable dentures. CAD/CAM technology produces ceramic perfection within minutes and motor-driven endodontics has become so efficient and simplified that millions of teeth can now be saved instead of extracted. However, while restoration will always be needed, preventive and restorative dentistry have only just begun to collaborate, particularly with regards to diagnosis and treatment.

The success of preventive dentistry remains in the hands of society and politics. Prevention seems to grow in countries with public health care systems and dental hygienists. Dental hygienists are key to providing oral hygiene instructions, education and patient motivation. Although dental hygienists do not even exist in France and Belgium, let alone in developing countries, prevention might be achievable in Western countries soon. However, the centuries-old notion of “prevention is better than cure” has no boundaries and should be the way forward for all medical fields.

We can further agree that preventive dental medicine will take generations to become the new standard in dentistry. 50 years ago, it would have been impossible to publish this magazine, for example. And in 50 years, diagnosis and treatment will have become so advanced that doctors will only debate about the different preventive options that are available.

So, I’m looking forward to smiling at Timo in 50 years. And I can’t wait to see him smile.

Thank you,
Marc & Timo