DR. RANI SAMSUDIN, a highly accredited dentist who has been involved in dental education for decades, shares her insights into the dental scene in the Middle East. In her recent appointment as the Dean of College of Dentistry at the University of Sharjah, she discusses the changes she has seen in the dental industry, the importance of integrating new technologies, and the impact of digital education on students.

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In the dental education scene, there is a rising interest in dental education here in the region. This is not new. It has been around for the past thirty to forty years. But I must say that in the early years in the introduction of computers to our students, the lessons were very boring, because their life is digital; they don’t find the lesson interesting. So when students learn in a classroom using the chalk and blackboard, method of teaching they find the lesson very boring, because their life is digital, and they can cope with it.

Therefore we consider all these factors, and because we know that the computer industry will take the dental industry to a different level, and it has happened now and will in the near future, we have added the CAD/CAM technologies in our curriculum. We have also introduced our students to methods of assessing and planning dental implants using software, to analyze where is the best site to place dental implants in the patients jaw, and all this planning is done using software. So coming back to CAD/CAM, we have started delivering lectures to students in CAD/CAM technology, we are the biggest investor in CAD/CAM technology education in this region, where for your information, we have four CAD/CAM systems in our clinics and labs, and all the systems are the Sirona Systems, and our dental technicians are also trained in using these technologies.

We also have a dental technology program—a diploma of dental technology where we train future dental technicians, who are very heavily involved in using CAD/CAM technology in their studies. Because we are very sure that when they graduate and they go into private dental labs, I am sure that all labs will need their knowledge and skills to operate the CAD/CAM and no more the manual way of constructing dentures and gums, therefore, we are in the second year of graduation. We train highly qualified and highly competent general practitioners to deliver their services for the betterment of the community and they come from countries of these expatriates, and we need to prepare them so that they are able to deliver their knowledge and skills to their own community. And they come from countries that have very high GDP, high income countries, and from countries that are still developing. So our curriculum meets the needs of these students, so I must say that we train highly qualified and highly competent general practitioners to deliver their services for the various levels of socio-economic status.

As in any medical related field, the industry of dentistry is always changing. Especially considering a trend that the world is seeing now with the integration of CAD/CAM dentistry being pushed farther than it has been before in the way that a lot of professionals and clinicians are constantly changing the way they completely perform. How has this affected the curriculum, or the way you teach your students? What are you doing to keep up with these changes? Well certainly the computer has changed our daily lives: it changed the way we work at our office and the way we live at home, in fact he way we travel to countries; it’s because of computers that we can fly high, we can fly faster and we can be anywhere in the world within a few hours. So computers have affected dentistry very much. But I must say that computer related technology in the medical and dental field is not new. It has been around for the past thirty or forty years. But I must say that the students now are being educated in an environment where it is not digital, they don’t find the lesson interesting. So when students learn in a classroom using the chalk and blackboard, method of teaching they find the lesson very boring, because their life is digital, and they can cope with it.