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‘If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is …’

An interview with Michael Miller, president/editor in chief of REALITY

By DT International Staff

Would you please tell our readers a little bit about yourself and how you got started in dentistry?

After graduating from dental school, I did a general practice hospital residency, which aroused my curiosity with research. Even though I decided to go into private practice instead of pursuing an academic career, I never lost that urge to participate in the scientific world in some way. About seven years after starting my practice, I decided I was guessing too much about patient care, and especially how to select and use all the new tooth-colored materials that were just beginning to explode in the marketplace. It was my contention that dentistry needed a publication that was a non-commercial product and technique guide. Because none existed, I asked another dentist here in Houston if he would like to help me get this publication off the ground. Our first book came out in October 1986 and I’ve been at it ever since.

You are the co-founder of REALITY Publishing Company. Could you explain, in brief, what REALITY is, which goals it has aimed to achieve and what distinguishes it from other publications in the dental field?

REALITY is a consensus report on products and techniques. Our mission is very simple: protect patients by informing dentists. We accomplish this by testing products and techniques using clinically relevant methods in our research laboratory as well as having our editorial team (ET), comprised of leading clinicians from around the world, use the products in their clinics and practices.

Would you please tell our readers about the REALITY star rating system?

Nothing could be farther from the truth. When a manufacturer submits a product, it has absolutely no control over the evaluation process. This is the reason some manufacturers do not submit products — they are wary about what we are going to find. In addition, because there is no fee involved for manufacturers when they submit products, we have no reason to try to please them. While we don’t believe in trashing products unprofessionally, we have warned our readers numerous times about products that don’t live up to their marketing propaganda. Any clinician who believes we are merely a marketing arm for manufacturers has never asked a manufacturer if it’s true.

How exactly does the product rating process work?

Products are listed on a password-protected section of our site for ET members’ eyes only. We then ask the ET members to select products that they are interested in evaluating. At least 10 members must volunteer to qualify for a complete evaluation. For more expensive equipment, the minimum is five. The manufacturers of these products are then invited to submit the product. If they agree, we provide them with the list of evaluators who have volunteered to evaluate the product.

Once the evaluators receive the product, they have 90 days to use it clinically and/or perform tests of their choosing. The goal is to provide dentists with a listing of products that have been independently tested and rated by a blinded panel of experts.

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Online learning allows everyone to benefit from C.E. courses without incurring the same costs as traveling to training sites.

Now Dental Tribune takes that idea one step further by introducing the Dental Tribune Study Club (DTSC). The site not only creates higher expectations in online learning, but also delivers on its promise.

Study clubs help increase interaction, providing practitioners with the opportunity to gain knowledge about products and techniques by easily tapping into their colleagues’ knowledge, including that from respected opinion leaders. Online dental study clubs provide an unparalleled way for practitioners to share ideas and best practices.

Dental Tribune launches Internet-based learning site with input from practitioners and opinion leaders

Dr. Bruce LeBlanc notes that direct composites have a longevity that qualifies them as a great value in terms of solving esthetic dilemmas. In addition, with conservative tooth preparations, the solution can often be realized in one visit.

Solving esthetic dilemmas

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Face, answers how hygienists can intervene to cure the melted enamel on the brackets and bands. This may even mean suggesting that the braces be removed in the most extreme cases of uncooperative patients.

Batman and braces?

Shirley Gutkowski, RDH, BSDH, FACE, answers how hygienists can intervene to cure the melted enamel on the brackets and bands. This may even mean suggesting that the braces be removed in the most extreme cases of uncooperative patients.

Solving esthetic dilemmas

Dr. Bruce LeBlanc notes that direct composites have a longevity that qualifies them as a great value in terms of solving esthetic dilemmas.
Canker sore therapy

A team of physicians at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has discovered that a nightly dose of vitamin B12 is a simple, effective and low risk therapy to prevent recurrent aphthous stomatitis (RAS), better known as “canker sores.” The findings were reported in the Jan./Feb. issue of the The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine. The lead researcher Dr. Ilia Volkov is a primary care physician in the Clalit Health Services and lecturer in Ben-Gurion University’s Department of Family Medicine in its Faculty of Health Sciences.

The researchers tested the effect of vitamin B12 on 58 randomly selected RAS patients who received either a dose of 1,000 mcg of B12 per month at bedtime or a placebo, and were tested monthly for six months. Approximately three quarters (74 percent) of the patients of the treated group and only a third (32 percent) of the control group achieved remission at the end of the study.

According to the research, “The average outbreak duration and the average number of ulcers per month decreased in both groups during the first four months of the trial. However, the duration of outbreaks, the number of ulcers, and the level of pain were reduced significantly at five and six months of treatment with vitamin B12, regardless of initial vitamin B12 levels in the blood. During the last month of treatment a significant number of participants in the intervention group reached ‘no aphthous ulcers status’ (74.1% vs. 52.0%; P < .01).”

The treated patients expressed greater comfort, reported less pain, fewer ulcers, and shorter outbreaks during the six months while among the control group the average pain level decreased during the first half of the period but increased during the second half.

(Source: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and American Associates)
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their choosing if they are privy to a testing lab. During this 90-day period, we perform our own tests on the product in the REALITY Research Lab (RRL), a specialized testing facility we created more than 10 years ago. At the end of the 90 days, each evaluator completes a form that I write concerning the product and send it to me via e-mail. I then compile the results from all the evaluators, check the results from the RRL, and write the final report. The actual numerical score and star rating for each product is largely the average of the evaluators’ scores modified by any exemplary or poor results in the RRL, although clinical results are always considered at a higher level than those from the lab.

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Which facilities are available in the REALITY Research Lab?

We have many pieces of equipment you would find in other research labs around the world, including an Instron for bond strength testing of adhesives and other materials, a digital hardness tester for measuring depth of cure, a thermocycler to age materials rapidly, a temperature/humidity chamber to test products in a mouth-like environment, a spectrophotometer to analyze the translucency/opacity of materials, a custom-made black light box to check the fluorescence of materials, and much more.

However, the real difference between our lab and others is the way we perform tests. Our methods have all been designed to simulate the clinical condition as closely as possible, which is the primary reason our results can be radically different compared to those claimed by manufacturers. For example, our depth of cure tests are done in real, human teeth. These tests show that the claims of composite and curing light manufacturers are greatly exaggerated. If any clinician follows a manufacturer’s advice in this area, there is a great probability that the restoration will be undercured.

Aside from checking the REALITY Web site, what clues should clinicians look for when choosing the right product?

It’s definitely a minefield out there, with clinicians and patients the ones to suffer when manufacturers overhype their products. But the old adage definitely applies — if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Reading the scientific research can also be helpful, but pretty boring and possibly outdated when it finally hits print. Listening to lectures from speakers who are honest about their commercial alliances is valuable, assuming the audience can separate the real information from the propaganda. And online chat groups can venture opinions on clinical factors such as whether a composite has nice handling characteristics, but can also be misleading if research is quoted incorrectly.

Are you familiar with the market in Asia and if so, how does it compare to the U.S. market?

I have lectured in Japan and Thailand, but I am not an expert in how dentistry differs between the two regions. My gut feeling, however, is that there is more dentistry in the U.S. focused on pure cosmetics compared to Asia.

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Contact info

Dr. Michael B. Miller is a Fellow of the Academy of General Dentistry, a Founding and Accredited Member, and Fellow of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, and has memberships in the International Association of Dental Research, Academy of Dental Materials and Academy of Operative Dentistry. He is also a founding board member of the National Children’s Oral Health Foundation, which is dedicated to fostering the development of local dental health and education facilities for under-served children. In addition, Dr. Miller is the co-founder, president and editor in chief of REALITY and maintains a dental practice in Houston, Texas. Reality Publishing Company 11757 Katy Fwy., Ste. #210 Houston, Texas 77079 Tel.: (800) 544-4898; (281) 558-9101 E-mail: mm@realityesthetics.com Web site: www.realityesthetics.com

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How would you grade the quality of work done by Asian professionals?

I have seen some absolutely beautiful dentistry come from the offices of Asian clinicians. Definitely on par with the U.S. and Europe.

Do you have any suggestions for readers who have an interest in incorporating cosmetic dentistry into their practice?

First, it takes a lot of study. You cannot attend a weekend seminar and learn the nuances of really fine cosmetic dentistry. Read as much as possible, attend numerous and varied seminars, and watch as many masters as possible. Then start with easy cases and progress to more demanding ones.