“The question is: Are clinics going to allow time for change?”

An interview with dental hygienist-therapist Theodora Little, London

About six months ago, London-based dental hygienist-therapist Theodora Little spoke openly about an issue that many dental clinics are facing right now: how are dental hygienists able to undertake essential care and thorough oral hygiene instructions in 20- to 30-minute appointments? In an interview at the BDHA Dental Showcase in London in the UK this year, Theodora introduced to a new prevention concept, individual training of oral prophylaxis, that will empower patients to maintain their oral health and thereby ultimately prevent dental disease.

Dental Tribune: Theodora, you graduated from King’s College London in 2013 with a diploma in dental hygiene and therapy. Why did you see a need to speak up for a change in oral hygiene instructions among dental professionals?

Theodora Little: We all want to do the best for our patients, but unfortunately, owing to time constraints that we have implemented here in the UK, it is not possible to carry out effective and thorough oral hygiene alongside education. During my time at university, our oral hygiene instruction training was very theory-based, with a few representatives visiting to demonstrate and provide different products. Unfortunately, we did not receive any interactive practical training on brushing with an instructor, which was a shame. I learnt more about the different techniques that have been used and recommended over the past years. This is why individually trained oral prophylaxis, or the iTOP programme, has become more important than ever. iTOP involves visual education on the techniques and products, all of which help motivate and empower patients to then implement preventive measures on a daily basis at home.

We do not want to be seen as contributors to this drill, fill and bill philosophy. Yes, because one goes back to the basics and prevention is, after all, the main priority. We do not want to be seen as contributors to this drill, fill and bill philosophy. iTOP combines relationship building through thorough communication and education, including touch to teach. If we can take dentistry back to the basic aspect of prevention based on this philosophy, then we can help prevent dental disease and empower our patients to then implement preventive measures on a daily basis at home.

Do dental practices really have the time to implement this plan?

In the UK, most dental hygienists have 20- to 30-minute appointments. I have worked to this pressured schedule in the past, so I understand how difficult it can be to educate, carry out thorough oral hygiene and answer any questions a patient may have. I was left feeling empty at the end of each day and questioned whether I was really helping and making a difference to my patients. I am now fortunate, as I work in a clinic where we have hourly appointments in order to provide a unique and tailored preventive service. Communication is key to successful education and oral hygiene; therefore, it should be a priority and hygienists should be given adequate time for delivery thereof. If one can educate the patient, prevention will follow and subsequent conveyor belt appointments will be eradicated. Unfortunately, many people do not like change, but it is sometimes necessary for long-term benefits.

A while ago, Chief Dental Officer for England Dr Sara Hurley said that one does not need to visit the dentist twice a year. What do you think about this?

As a hygienist-therapist from a prevention perspective, I prefer to see a patient on a regular basis. We are all human and it can be difficult sometimes with life’s twists and turns to continue with a daily habit. I find habits can easily be broken when something of greater importance pops up. Therefore, many patients need regular super-
“Every patient and his or her mouth is different, so one size does not fit all.”

TRENDS & APPLICATIONS

Could you tell us more about the state of oral health in the UK?

It certainly depends on the region and age group of patients one is treating. I have found that, since working in the Curaden clinic in London, I have treated more patients with tooth surface loss and recession rather than periodontal disease. This may be because of the age group, combined with the fact that they appear to be extremely health conscious. This, in turn, involves a very acidic diet, owing to the consumption of fruit on a regular basis in different forms, constant sipping when exercising and using many of the in products, but in the incorrect way, or perhaps using what is not right for them. Over brushing with potentially abrasive whitening toothpaste can contribute too. Tooth surface loss can then lead to hypersensitivity, which can be unbearable for some patients. Therefore, we continue to proceed with iTOP, together with high-quality products, such as CURAPROX’s CS 5460 toothbrush.

Which do you recommend: dental floss or interdental brushes?

Every patient and his or her mouth is different, so one size does not fit all. I tailor recommendations based on the individual. Some patients may have larger interdental spaces and in general I would then recommend interdental brushes, as one can use theseatrautomatically if the right size is selected and the correct technique has been demonstrated. Flossing can cause trauma if used incorrectly, focusing can cause trauma if used incorrectly. As with every dental aid, the technique, quality and training given with that aid and for that individual patient are of most importance. However, if my patients prefer one product over the other and refuse to use interdental brushes, for example, then I would rather have them using floss than nothing at all. Still, the important thing is taking the time to discuss the different products with the patient and their benefits and then demonstrate the technique through touch to teach. However, this is where we need time, and the question is: are clinics going to allow time for change?

Thank you very much for the interview.

LONDON’S TOP 10 ATTRACTIONS

1. BRITISH MUSEUM

The world-famous British Museum exhibits the works of man from prehistoric to modern times, from around the world. Highlights include the Rosetta Stone, the Parthenon sculptures and the mummies in the Ancient Egypt collection. Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets.

2. NATIONAL GALLERY

The crowning glory of Trafalgar Square, London’s National Gallery is a vast space filled with Western European paintings from the 13th to the 20th centuries. In this iconic art gallery you can find works by masters such as Van Gogh, da Vinci, Botticelli, Constable, Renoir, Titian and Stubbs. Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets.

3. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

As well as the permanent (and permanently fascinating!) dinosaur exhibitions, the Natural History Museum boasts a collection of the largest, oldest and rarest animals in the world. Some are frozen in time, a 40-million-year-old spider, or the beautiful Central Hall. Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets.

4. TATE MODERN

Sitting grandly on the banks of the Thames is Tate Modern. Britain’s national museum of modern and contemporary art, its unique shape is due to it previously being a power station. The gallery’s restaurants offer fabulous views across the city. Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets.

5. THE LONDON EYE

The London Eye is a major feature of London’s skyline. It boasts some of London’s best views from its 32 capsules, each weighing 10 tonnes and holding up to 25 people. Climb aboard for a breathtaking experience, with an unforgettable perspective of more than 55 of London’s famous landmarks – all in just 30 minutes!

6. SCIENCE MUSEUM

From the future of space travel to asking that difficult question: “who am I?” the Science Museum makes you think, perform Olympic standard mental gymnastics. See, touch and experience the major scientific advances of the last 300 years, and don’t forget the awesome IMAX cinema. Entry is free but some exhibitions require tickets.

7. VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

The V&A celebrates art and design with 3,000 years’ worth of amazing exhibits from around the world. A real treasure trove of goodies, you never know what you’ll discover: real furniture, paintings, sculpture, metal work and textiles, the list goes on and on... Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets to purchase tickets.

8. TOWER OF LONDON

Take a tour with one of the Yeoman Warders around the Tower of London, one of the world’s most famous buildings. Discover its 900-year history as a royal palace, prison and place of execution, arsenal, jewel house and fortress through a 30-minute guided tour of the White Tower, into the State Apartments and the Crown Jewels.

9. ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH

Visit the National Maritime Museum - the world’s largest maritime museum, the Cutty Sark: all part of the world’s most famous landmarks. Entry is free but special exhibitions require tickets.

10. MADAME TUSSAUDS

At Madame Tussauds, you’ll come face-to-face with some of the world’s most famous faces. From Shakespeare to Lady Gaga you’ll meet influential figures from around the world, politics and even royals. Strike a pose with David Beckham, get close to One Direction or receive a once-in-a-lifetime audience with the Majesty the Queen. Charges apply.

VISITLONDON.COM

© Marc Chalupsky/DTI