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.

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 and visual education on the techniques and products, all of which help motivate and empower patients to feel confident and positive about brushing.

You say that iTOP changes the way patients are treated—that both personally and clinically.

Theodora Little spoke openly about a prevention concept, individual training of oral prophylaxis, or the iTOP programme, has become more important than ever 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 demonstrations with patients, alongside verbal touch to teach demonstrations with patients, alongside verbal

“Do dental practices really have the space to provide an iTOP programme on a daily basis?”

Theodora Little: As a hygienist-therapist from a preventive 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-

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“Every patient and his or her mouth is different, so one size does not fit all.”