Back to basics – keep it simple works....but technology is nice too

Mhari Coxon discusses technology and innovation

It is so easy to get caught up in new innovation and technology. I love shiny things and am drawn to them. And, innovation makes ours and our patients lives much easier. But the mistake we often make is to start to drop the basic staple fundamentals of prevention. This can lead to our patients becoming un-healthy again and, in worst case scenario, have active dental disease.

When we have been working in the same practice for a long time, it can be hard to change or add to your clinical work, as patients have become familiar with how it works just now. Once we have established the rhythm of our appointments it can be difficult to add to or change our clinical behaviour.

Bringing it back to basics

I lectured recently at Dentistry Show 2012 and talked about implementing change in your clinical day. One of the examples I used was re-introducing disclosing patients to better assess their oral hygiene. Periodontists hardly ever use it as a tool and so can often forget to reinforce its importance in general practice.

Many of us found this boring and messy and if enough patients complained, and we forgot the benefit of it; we tended to drop it as a tool pretty quickly after qualifying. The trouble is if it has been a few years without this basic, how do you explain to patients that you are reintroducing it and that their oral hygiene needs to be better? What do you say when they ask why you haven’t ever done this before?

‘Once we have established the rhythm of our appointments it can be difficult to add to or change our clinical behaviour’

Blame someone else and prepare the patient for the change

This makes it so much easier on both you and the patient. So...blame CQC and their new patient centred lifelong care plans. Or...blame the Department of Health and their De-

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toolkit and how we have to be evidence based. Neither of these bodies will be bothered and you have your excuse for change.

Prepare the patient for the change. If you write or call to confirm their appointment, explain that this time we will be using a special dye that will show us how we can help you to clean better at home and act as a road map so we can clean your mouth really well. Reassure them that it will all come off before they leave the surgery. Giving the patient notice of the change will reduce the negative response you can get with no prior warning.

Delegate to an enthusiastic team member for best results
I love to disclose my patients. It makes me happy that they care about what the outcome will be. I like that entire families compete with each other to do the disclosing and digital photographs of this is one of the dental nursing team. They can even provide the oral hygiene advice to the patient in a non clinical environment. This can make it much easier for the patient to learn, relax and respond to advice. The digital photographs act as a record of oral hygiene advice being given and can be sent to the patient be email to help them remember where to brush. My friend Fiona, who has recently re-established her love of disclosing, goes one step further and films the patient using the correct product and technique on the areas they need to concentrate on their own phone. Then they can play it back at home to reinforce the new routine.

There is an app for that
There is a fantastic app to complement this that really is simple, back to basics combined with technology. It is called brush DJ and was the brainchild of dentist Ben Underwood. It selects tunes from your phone or iPad and plays them with a circular timer on screen to help you brush for two minutes. It also helps you to remember to floss, not spit out and use a fluoride mouthwash. You can set your appointments with your dentist and hygienist in it and it will even remind you when it is time to get a new toothbrush head. For more information and to download the free app visit www.brushdj.com/

So go back to basics, mixed with a bit of technology and see your patient’s enthusiasm grow and see their health improve.

About the author
Mhari has 20 years experience in dentistry, working as a nurse, receptionist, oral health adviser and ultimately hygienist in a variety of practice environments. She is passionate about her profession. At present, she works as Senior Professional Relations Manager for Philips Oral Healthcare and clinically as a hygienist in central London. From Chairing the London BSDHT for 3 years, and working as an MD, Mhari excels at motivating and co-ordinating a team and utilising skills, decentralising leadership and developing self efficacy in members. Throughout her career Mhari has developed hygiene protocols and plans in practices which have continued to be used with great success. Mhari is Clinical Director for CPDforDCP Ltd, a training company offering motivational and interactive development courses in the dental team. A keen writer, Mhari is on the Publications Committee of Dental Health, the British Society of Hygienists and Therapists (BSDHT) Journal, has a conversational column in Dental Tribune and writes articles for many other publications and online sites. As a speaker Mhari has presented regionally, nationally and internationally for many groups including Talking Points for Doctors, the British Orthodontic Society Specialist group, the BSDHT, the International Symposium of Dental Hygiene, the dentistry show and many others. In 2006 she was the Probe Awards hygienist of the year, and was highly commended in 2010. 2011 saw her placed 15 in the Dentistry Top 50 most influential people in the UK.