

Zoom in on dental photography

Dr Philip Wander* explores applications of dental photography in general dental practice and explains why it is so important.



The ultimate patient record

First and foremost, photographs complement patient records. Photographs, along with written description, paint a complete picture of a case. They serve as an ideal and informative way to document the progress of a case from every angle and during each visit. Charting the progress of a case you can monitor everything from healing after surgery to soft tissue pathology, cracks in fillings, and most importantly, you can have a visual reference to all cases available in your patient charts. The concept of digital photography enhances the ultimate goal of many practices to move toward a paperless practice. Digital images can be added directly to practice management

programs to make for the ultimate patient record.

For years photography has been an integral component of dental education. Today, with the increase in medico-legal problems, the difficult economic times, and the increased need for patient motivation and communication and practice management, practitioners are looking for ways to both increase patient flow and expand the scope of their practice.

Digital dental photography

Photography is a hobby enjoyed by millions. For many years it has played a vital part in our lifestyle, at work and at play. It is found in almost every aspect of day-to-day living, and is an important source of information, education, advertising and revenue. Digital dental photography is one of the most versatile and easiest of media to work with. It is rapidly becoming one of the tools used routinely in dentistry today.

Progress has been the bottom line in dentistry over the past decade. The advances in technique and materials have astounded all, and have led us into a new age of clinical dentistry.

With the new techniques comes a renewed commitment to quality and excellence, from clinical dentistry to practice management. Photography stands at the forefront of these changes; it enables the practitioner to record patient cases for review by the practitioners and their colleagues, to record the patient's condition for malpractice suits – in practice

management situations, and, of course, for protection against litigation.

Every practitioner has the obligation to do the best work he or she possibly can, and constant self-examination and evaluation is required. Photographs of before and after cases clearly show the dentist where the work can be improved. Even when the finished product appears clinically sound, when viewing the image from a clinical photograph, many restorations will reveal hidden defects and the problems that the dentist can address during the next clinical procedure.

Increased competition amongst professionals in the form of advertising, large group practice, chain operations and marketing has sent most practitioners searching for new ways to find and keep patients. Internal and external marketing practices can be employed by dental professionals.

Practice marketing

The most effective means of internal marketing is proper practice management, and the use of photographs can help to market the practice in numerous ways such as newsletters and welcome packs. For external marketing the most effective way is via your website which can be greatly enhanced by including photographs of work you have carried out, to engage prospective patients.

Increasing awareness on the public part of legal recourse against professionals has sent medical and dental practitioners scurrying

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to find protection. The public's realisation of the fallibility of the professional has caused malpractice cases to soar. The best defence against a malpractice suit is proper record keeping and clinical competency. Photography provides the answer to the first, and certainly helps the practitioner achieve clinical excellence by way of self-review. The use of photography as a standard part of the patient's records is becoming universal procedure among medical and dental professionals. Almost all specialists are now supplementing records with photographs of their cases, and general practitioners are following suit.

the concept of professional - patient communication. Now through photography, a patient **can see what a dental professional sees** and therefore understand the importance of treatment and be involved in their own treatment planning.

Images can be imported into cosmetic imaging programs and edited to show potential 'before and afters'. With the art of cosmetic dentistry growing and elective cosmetic procedures on the rise, this form of imaging is instrumental in selling cases by actually showing patients how potential changes could affect the way they look. This concept has become so popular and widely marketed that

understand both the treatment required and the procedures involved. This understanding by the patient allows for open communication and prevents any misunderstanding. The increased awareness also increases patient motivation towards their dental health.

A simple way of presenting the photographs is view the images on a laptop or iPad.

Trouble spots in the mouth can be identified which cannot be seen by the patient using direct vision or mirrors. The patient now actually sees the cavities, misplaced teeth and broken fillings, not wondering if the practitioner has fabricated any imaginary problems. Full arch occlusal photographs are particularly useful.



Comprehensive series of photographs for a new patient

The 'team' approach

Photographic techniques can be taught and applied by the whole dental team. The basics are very easy to learn and follow - the best way is to attend a suitable 'hands on' course. Interaction between staff and patients is unbelievably powerful. Reception, chairside, dental therapists and hygienists - the whole of your team need and should want to be involved in the whole experience of encouraging the patient to want the very best for their dental health, appearance and function. The use of photography goes a huge way to help understanding and solving dental problems.

Equipment is simple to use, reliable, specialised for our purposes, and cost effective. Some of the benefits of using photography in practice are its versatility, flexibility, durability and inexpensiveness. The applications of intra-oral photography are countless, limited only by the imagination of the practitioner.

Receptionist/treatment coordinator

In many practices a specific member of staff is empowered to undertake initial photographs at the patient's first visit, especially for treatment planning and cosmetic imaging and can save valuable time downloading images ready for the dentist to analyse.

Practice promotion

Photography in the dental practice can help stimulate patient awareness, motivation and interest. Dental photography has revolutionised

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today many prospective patients not only enjoy seeing the potential before and after picture, but will often select a practice that offers this technology.

TELL or SHOW?

Digital photography enables you to view and review images taken and then display and relay the information to patients.

Photographs make it easier for the patient to comprehend the conditions present, and to

A rewarding experience

Photography is a tool, and when properly used in dentistry makes dental practice a much easier and more rewarding experience. Patients will benefit from greater understanding and better quality dentistry being performed. Staff will benefit from an exciting atmosphere and have greater ease and understanding of their role in the management of the practice. And the practitioner will benefit, as improved quality of dentistry is sure to follow after closely scrutinising photographs of work done. The improved record keeping will offer security against law suits, and the improvement in practice patient flow and increased level of treatment plan acceptance is sure to put a smile on the face of every practitioner. The camera is truly an eye to a better practice and great fun too.

The BDA Training *essentials* course portfolio offers a one-day interactive course for the whole dental team, 'Clinical photography in the dental practice'. The course covers the techniques of how to take quality, predictable dental photographs and incorporate them into your day-to-day practice. Visit www.bda.org/training or call BDA Events on 020 7563 4590 for further information.