Interview: “Digital dentistry is the future”

By DTI

The use of digital technologies in dentistry is on the rise, a fact that Dr Andreas Kurbad is well aware of. Kurbad, who has been running his own dental practice specialising in cosmetic dentistry and implantology since 1990, is convinced that the use of modern technologies is a growing trend in all areas and to believe that this will not come to the dental clinic would be a big mistake. Dental Tribune Online sat down with Kurbad to talk about his IDEM lecture and to find out more about his fascination for digital dentistry and his vision of the future.

You are presenting a lecture titled “In-office digital solutions—Expanding the limits” tomorrow. What is your lecture about and what are the main learning objectives you are aiming for?

When speaking about digitalisation in dentistry, most of my peers first and foremost think of digital impressions, but of course, it is more than this. The digital office starts with marketing and administration. The clinic website, the ability to schedule appointments online, etc. are in my opinion also part of digital dentistry.

The main focus of my lecture will lie on the clinical side of technology in the dental office. We will be looking at digital technology that already exists, reviewing what the literature says about the subject, discussing some software and what we can do with it, touching on methods of production and workflows, and doing a comparison of conventional and contemporary methods.

You have touched on some advantages of digital technology, but what are its limitations?

The way I see it, they are not really limitations, but consequences of the digitalisation process. The first thing is a simple one: digital dentistry is a question of investment. If one wants to buy a good scanner, one has to put a large amount of money towards it and will maybe even have additional costs for licensing and so on.

Secondly, all the changes in the workflow are associated with a learning curve. One cannot simply sit down in front of a machine and expect to work it properly without spending time learning how it works. One must train and educate oneself.

Lastly, if one is working with digital technology, one needs to adapt one’s workflow accordingly. One cannot simply decide that tomorrow one will start the day with chairside restorations. Clinically, this is a totally different organisational process and all the staff need to learn the new workflows. Actually, this is one more reason to start with digital dentistry now and not later, because there are more and more changes coming.

The use of digital technology is a growing trend. What do you think the next five to ten years will bring in terms of new products or workflows?

I believe that the majority will have adopted to the digitalisation process and will mainly work with modern technology. Some will stick to conventional methods, but they will be the minority. It is like people that listen to vinyl — there are only a few people these days that do so, but they exist.

As for products, I am hoping for solutions that improve the scanning quality. Also, while we have many digital options available already, they should be integrated and connected together. For example, in implantology, 3D radiographic units and 3D surface scanners already exist. In the future, I envision a virtual assistant or some sort of augmented reality glasses that will help one place the implant by telling one to move left or right or adjust the angle or whatever. It would be so helpful and I am convinced this will be developed.

For more than 20 years, you have lectured and taught many courses on CAD/CAM in dentistry, and you have also written a textbook on the subject. What do you find most fascinating about the CAD/CAM field?

The thing that fascinates me the most is that the field is constantly evolving. Often one thinks that there cannot be anything else that is more advanced and newer than the machine one already owns, but then such a device comes along. And this development is unbelievable.

Comparing digital dentistry from when you started your career to now, where are the greatest developments? And are there any treatments available now that you could never have imagined a few years ago?

Some things that are possible today I could not have dreamed of a few years ago. I started in 1994 with a CEREC machine and when we switched to CEREC 2 in 1996 it was unbelievable. It was the first software we had for crowns and we were so amazed that we were able to make crowns. Nowadays, there are many more things that I could never have expected and the amazing thing is that there is no end in sight. I have just turned 60 and a few people were asking me about retirement and I said I could not even think about that right now because at the moment this process is so interesting and amazing. I could not imagine not being a part of it.

The most impressive development is that we can now virtually place an implant by telling the software to move left or right or adjust the angle or whatever. It would be so helpful and I am convinced this will be developed.

INTERVIEW

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