Collaborative software connects dental professionals on a global scale

By Robin Goodman, Group Editor

At the end of June, Modulus Media — a Toronto-based technology development and marketing company — announced the release of DentalCollab.com. Company founder Shane Powell sat down for an interview to highlight what this unique service has in store for the dental community.

DentalCollab.com is a prime example of "cloud computing," but what does cloud computing mean? We use cloud computing services all the time, such as Twitter, Facebook, Salesforce.com, LinkedIn. DentalCollab.com is a software program that runs on the Internet through your Web browser. It doesn’t care whether you are using a Mac or a PC, if you are a technological wizard or a regular computer user. All you need is an Internet connection. It simultaneously scales to meet the demands of each individual user, so you don’t have to worry about costly software and hardware upgrades. It’s all upgraded automatically, and for free.

Can you trust this online “cloud” with your information and, more importantly, your patient’s information? Just as you trust online banking with your finances, FaceBook with your friends, Gmail with your e-mail correspondence, DentalCollab.com has built a security system that protects your data. At rest or at play, your data is being secured with 256-bit encryption — just like what the banks use — 24/7 system monitoring and redundant storage. Yes, it’s secure and yes, it can be trusted.

Why isn’t all of our day-to-day dental software running in the “cloud”? Most dental software was built to run directly on your personal computer. This includes everything from your word processing to your practice management software. You can imagine that it’s not easy, or cheap, to “rewrite” software to run in the “clouds,” also known as the Internet.

The vast majority of dental professionals have been using their practice management software for years. Because of this, there are massive numbers of users that are ostensibly tied to their desktop computers. What’s the ideal solution? It’s simple. Continue using your desktop-based software and use DentalCollab.com to bridge your offline practice with the online global dental community.

Significant examples of software trending to the clouds include: Microsoft Office Live bringing its office products into the online cloud; Google Docs, its online office suite was the catalyst for Microsoft to start bringing its office products into the online clouds. What about all the other programs dentists are currently running on their practice computers, does all this have to be replaced? DentalCollab.com doesn’t replace your desktop software; it will extend your reach. DentalCollab.com actually caters to the practices that need a collaboration tool, an online workspace, an information hub that can be securely accessed and easily shared online. Connect with your team, specialists, referrals, any other dental professionals or groups of professionals from around the globe.

Most dental offices are using legacy software that does a great job of managing their day-to-day practice, but it ties them to their desktop computer. We all know it isn’t practical to replace your practice management software; therefore DentalCollab.com acts as the intermediary, intuitively extending the reach of your offline applications, or “in the clouds” as we say.

How exactly does DentalCollab.com’s cloud computing service help dental professionals? Now that dental professionals know that they can still use their existing software, they can relax. DentalCollab.com is designed to be super easy to use. Taking this approach, we offer a much shorter learning curve to effectively collaborate online. It’s quick and it’s easy to get started, and exceptionally versatile.

There are tremendous benefits for enhancing patient care through extending one’s expertise through a professional network of local specialists, as well as dipping into the vast global talent pool.

Benefits include: open up treatment mentoring with industry experts worldwide; better manage your referrals by inviting labs, specialists, etc.; request second opinions, something insurance companies love; provide patients with access to their treatment plans, X-rays and follow-up information.

Can you tell us more about the Treatment Workspace and how one navigates around it? Actually, think of it as your “collaborative” Treatment Workspace. It’s as easy to use as a blog’s and wiki’s, but with specific functionality built in for dental professionals. Apart from the intuitive interface, users also benefit from sharing their workspaces with other professionals within their network. This is where the magic begins and you start connecting and really working together.

How secure is DentalCollab.com? Isn’t the information just “out there” for anyone to grab? The world’s information is being transferred to the Internet. It’s alarming how much you can learn about someone nowadays. We trust popu-
lar online services such as Facebook, Salesforce.com, Gmail, and Hotmail without batting an eye. Compared to DentalCollab.com, their data is less secure.

We have built a closed network around each user’s account. If you don’t specifically invite people to access a Treatment Workspace, they can’t get in. It’s as simple as that.

How can DentalCollab.com actually save time and money?

Time savings is realized through improved organization and better communication between team members, suppliers, referrals and even sales representatives, thus saving you time and headaches. Whether you are learning new procedures, training with new instrumentation, or sharing your own particular expertise, DentalCollab.com is perfectly suited for learning and mentoring.

Enhanced patient health has tremendous short- and long-term benefits for your practice. No longer are you limited to your local specialist. With DentalCollab.com you can access world-class opinion leaders to enable you to make the best decision possible. A happy patient means more referrals.

Your insurance company will love you. Managing your second opinions through your Treatment Workspace means that you automatically maintain a secure history of all your collaborations. Think of it as record-keeping insurance that helps to protect you against patient problems.

e-Consultations are becoming a requirement as many patients have less and less time. Common treatment planning and follow-ups can be done over the Internet. Securely invite patients to view their complete treatment plan past, present and future.

So would you walk us through a visit to the site and what a dentist would see once he begins using DentalCollab.com?

Once inside, you’ll see right away how easy it is to create a patient file, create a new Treatment Workspace and invite collaborators to join in.

1) Log-in to your account.
2) Manage Patients: As easy as filling out a form. Invite patients to view their treatment information anytime.
3) Create Treatment Workspaces: Upload X-rays and supporting files, create treatment plans, set priorities and organize your tasks between collaborators.
4) Invite Collaborators: Invite office staff, doctors, specialists, mentors, sales support staff from manufacturers and patients. Any of these invitation-only “treatment collaborators” can review/edit treatment plans, provide a second opinion or simply provide a follow-up e-Consultation.
5) How to Manage Collaborators: Revoke access at any time, subscribe to daily, weekly, monthly reports and schedule reminders.

DentalCollab has a solid developmental roadmap. Looking into the future we see many opportunities for extending our functionality. However, it’s important that we develop in the right places.

We welcome your feedback and have set up a special offer. Enter code “DTCLOUD” for one free month’s access. You’ll see why we believe that collaboration makes the world a better place.

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How is charting handled?

We’re enabling you to connect any of your existing software with the online DentalCollab.com network. Quickly upload, organize and share your charts, X-rays, photos and all related files. Once you start working with the system, you won’t know how you did without this fabulous resource tool.

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