

The true value of technology

In this exclusive interview, Anna Middleton considers the true value of using new evidence-based technology and protocols in dental practice.

What does incorporating new technologies into dental practice mean for you?

Dentistry has evolved so much, and, for me, new technology and equipment has meant I can provide a better service and experience for my patients. Being able to treat in a minimally invasive way has always been a priority of mine. I have often said fear and a lack of control are huge barriers to patients seeking treatment. Offering pain-free solutions with modern techniques is one way my day-to-day practice has benefited.

In your role, what encourages or discourages you from taking up new technologies?

Technology that can improve the patient experience and treatment outcomes is a definite plus for me. I do believe in working smarter over harder, so I use technology with clinically-based evidence and research to ensure I can work more effectively and comfortably. For example, I now use EMS' Guided Biofilm Therapy (GBT) in my daily practice, which means 20 minutes of traditional 'scaling' has been reduced to seven minutes of pain-free biofilm management. This gives more time to focus on the patient's oral hygiene routine and allows me to fit more appointments in to the day, which has coincidentally increased turnover.

How can a dental professional assess what is worth investing in?

For me, ensuring every patient has a good experience is what has led me to invest in the latest equipment and technology. I want patients to have a pain-free and pleasant experience so they keep coming back. I also wanted to be able to carry out procedures in a timely manner and not to put my body under unnecessary stress. For example, I wear loupes with a light to help my sight and posture, and I use methods and instruments to reduce my risk of such things as carpal tunnel and repetitive strain in my wrists.



The initial financial outlay can be discouraging – what would you say to any dentists or direct access hygienists concerned about making a big investment in something?

Innovation is the only real way forward in terms of prevention rather than treatment, and therefore offers better care for patients. New technology can also excite and reassure patients, meaning they keep coming back, so that in the end any financial outlay pays for itself. And that isn't all – having invested in my equipment means I am working more efficiently as a clinician.

Finances aside, what might happen in a practice if they don't manage to upgrade their technology?

You do run the risk of losing patients who want to experience things they have read about or heard of others having. Social media is playing a huge part in showcasing advances in dental technology, along with the results of various treatments. When I was previously using dated equipment, it

regularly resulted in lower efficiency and productivity.

How can dental professionals communicate to best effect with patients about new systems, in order to ensure they experience a smooth and favourable change over?

Just talk and explain. When I switched to GBT, I was worried patients would question the length of their treatment and the new approach. I have even been asked, 'Why didn't you do the "scrapey" thing?!' Once I explained to them about the protocol, biofilm and how the equipment worked, they were very receptive to the change and, by the end of their appointment, welcomed the new approach.

How important is support from the technology provider and what should buyers be looking for from them?

It is so important, especially if something isn't working or there is a problem. I like to be able to call or message someone at any time and receive support. EMS is a leading

example of continued support and there is even an online forum for users, so we can help each other. When considering new purchases, speak to other users to gauge their experience and arrange for a rep to come to give you a demo in practice. Most companies now even let you trial their equipment free of charge for a period of time.

During your dental career, is there anything that stands out from the crowd in terms of changing things for the better?

As I mentored earlier, there is EMS' GBT, which has resulted in reduced chair time, increased patient comfort and improved treatment outcomes and, as a natural consequence of all of that, an increase in new business.

Then there's iTero 3D scanning, which is amazing for showing patients treatment outcomes of Invisalign, as well as documenting a patient's oral health, shade of teeth and I can even take digital scans instead of impressions and send them straight to the lab for whitening trays, which patients love.

SmileView from Invisalign, meanwhile, allows patients to take a selfie on their phone and then, in 60 seconds, they can see a preview of how their teeth could look after treatment.

I also really like Smile Lite MDP, which turns my mobile into an SLR camera with ring flash. I use this to take before and after photos of patients that are extremely high quality, and the unit is so light and portable.

Long-term, what do you hope to achieve using new, evidence-based equipment and protocols?

My mission is to achieve improved attitudes towards dentistry and oral health from the patient's perspective. I also think it's really important to keep growing the awareness of the role of a hygienist and the services they can offer. Alongside that, I want to continue ensuring prevention of disease as well as supporting the work that dentists carry out. In my opinion, using evidence-based equipment and protocols is a significant part of working towards achieving all of that. ■

For further details about what EMS Dental has to offer dental professionals in the UK, please visit www.ems-dental.com.

About the author

Anna Middleton is a multi-award-winning dental hygienist. She studied at The Eastman Dental Hospital after working as a dental nurse, and graduated in 2015 from the Faculty of Royal College of Surgeons. She is the founder of London Hygienist, which has a mission to change the way oral health care is delivered to patients. Anna is a key opinion leader for Philips, a global Guided Biofilm Therapy ambassador for EMS Dental and a member of the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy. Anna lectures, and writes regularly for both industry and consumer press.

