

The salesmanship of dental care

The art of establishing long-lasting good oral hygiene habits involves effective instructions and good communication. But ethical sales also now play a big part in achieving patient behaviour change. 'London Hygienist' and Philips key opinion leader, **Anna Middleton**, explains

We live in an age where we have 24/7 access to information.

The public can learn freely and this opens conversations with our patients in surgery.

Some of the challenges can be information overload as well as misinformation – both of which can be detrimental to an individual's health and wellbeing. For example, the advertising of mouthwash containing chlorhexidine to treat bleeding gums fails to communicate the message that good oral hygiene is still needed, and the mouthwash in itself is not a long-term solution to a problem.

Mixed messages can often leave patients confused, but again this is a fantastic opportunity for me to then guide them to a better understanding, which allows them to make better choices.

However, there are lots of messages reaching patients that are correct, such as attending regularly, the use of fluoride and key diet messages to prevent dental decay and erosion.

I use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to share key messages – and pictures can speak volumes.

Many professionals use social media and the internet to communicate with patients



Anna Middleton has three years of experience as a dental hygienist, having qualified as a dental nurse in 2011. She is a Philips key opinion leader and can be found on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook as @Londonhygienist.



and other professionals – not just locally but globally. I share pictures, regularly write blogs, contribute to articles in the press and share other articles to help educate patients and to continue my own learning. I also share 'before and after' pictures of patients who have had various treatments with me. Some show the difference between unhealthy gums and healthy gums, others show patients who have had whitening or stain removal. I also like to share tips and facts online and engage with followers and answer any questions they may have.

Understanding the science and knowing the evidence gives me confidence in my product recommendations.

Patients often ask me about various products, such as electric toothbrushes, toothpastes and mouthwashes, and I can educate them about the research behind the

product, advise which would be beneficial and where a product would best fit into their oral hygiene routine to ensure it is tailored to their needs.

No two mouths are the same.

Remember, what works for one patient may not be suitable for another. The way in which the information is presented to the patient should be tailored to their understanding and their ability to implement actions as well.

We live in a world where we often listen to respond rather than listen to understand.

I motivate my patients with my personal style and delivery. I always say 'know your audience' and tend to use analogies – and sometimes humour – when treating my patients. If you fail to connect with the patient or get them engaged in what you are showing them, they won't listen or



Understand. I include them in what I am doing during the appointment – for example, I will let them know what I am looking for when I am probing or explain how and why calculus has formed. I truly believe prevention is key and strive to educate as well as motivate my patients.

I think collaborations are a wonderful way of strengthening messages.

They also add value to the roles we play as oral health educators and providers. I have collaborated with companies on specific oral health products and with other dental professionals. It works well.

The focus on healthy living and healthcare grows ever more prevalent.

People are opting for a healthier diet and the fitness world is booming. Scientific studies are also having an impact on patients. The relationship between various systemic conditions and oral health is now well documented and patients are better informed – not only by the dental team, but also by other healthcare professionals.

Finances can often be a perceived barrier to good oral health.

Dentistry is often considered ‘expensive’ but if you can break down that barrier and effectively explain to a patient the ‘value’, then I don’t find it is a problem and patients are happy. If you present patients with all their options for various products and treatments, and talk them through each one, the patient then has all the information to make an informed choice.

Simple conversations with patients about products and services work best. I often ask questions such as: ‘Have you ever considered switching to an electric toothbrush?’ Then, based on the patient’s reply, I can talk about the benefits of using one and the various options out there, as well as share evidence-based research with them.

The patient is then free to choose if they take my advice or not, and I have acted ethically by giving them all the information they need.

Clinical-based evidence can justify exactly why you’re promoting a certain product over another.

Patient preference will play a key role, too. If the patient doesn’t like the product, then they will not be compliant and therefore long-term results will not be achieved.

It is crucial to stay up to date on new evidence and product developments.

Dentistry is ever changing and evolving. Staying abreast of the latest research or upgrades and new products will ensure you are continually recommending the best and most effective products at all times. I don’t recommend anything I haven’t tried myself or personally use regularly.

Good record keeping and documenting your recommendations is important in the ethical selling process.

Patients can be overwhelmed with all the information they can sometimes receive at an appointment. I try to gradually build

an oral hygiene routine, if they haven't already established one. Recording the recommendations is important. Patients often forget what we have shown them or told them.

I have all my recommended products in my practices as I think it is best that patients leave with what they need.

I will often demonstrate interdental and interspace brushes in the patient's mouth for them, so they can see and feel exactly what they need to do.

Offering samples in the clinic is a wonderful way to show patients various products and how to use them. Again, not every product is suitable for everyone, so having samples allows the patient to try the various products that meet their needs.

Electric toothbrushes have kept up with the digital age.

Developments in products have come a long way and more and more patients are now seeing the benefits of switching from a manual toothbrush to an electric toothbrush. There are several on the market now equipped with a smart app to help ensure effective brushing.

Teeth whitening is extremely popular – and it's easy to see why.

It can enhance appearance, boost confidence and make us look younger. But many patients still fail to realise that teeth whitening and the use of hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide can only be carried out by a dental professional. I take time to remind those who ask about Zoom! Whitening that teeth whitening is the practice of dentistry and that only a qualified dental professional (for whom teeth whitening is part of their Scope of Practice) can whiten teeth. Anyone else offering such a service is breaking the law and could be putting them at risk.

It is important to advise on safe, evidence-based treatments. While whitening is a safe procedure, patients need to be empowered to make informed choices and we are well placed to have these conversations. I also tell patients to be careful when using a whitening toothpaste – it can be abrasive and damage the enamel – and I

Feeling protective – Anna's findings on behaviour change

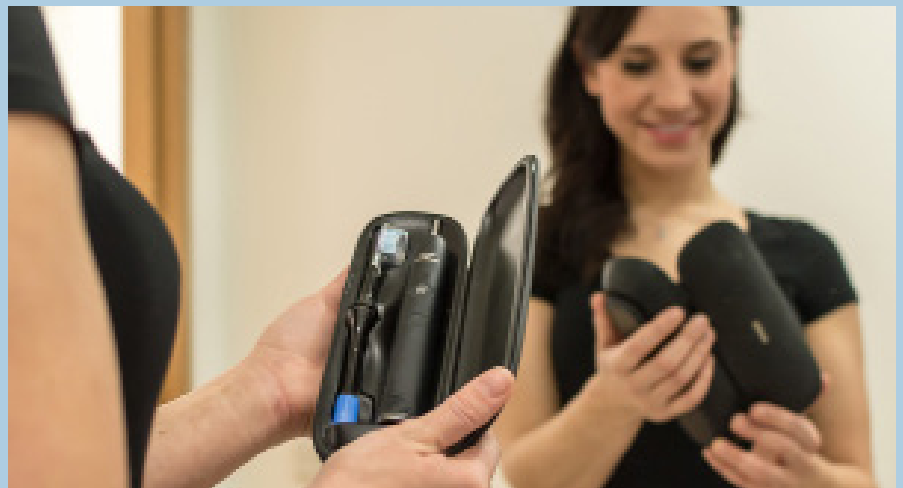
Philips recently announced the launch of its Sonicare ProtectiveClean toothbrush. The new range incorporates Sonicare's patented technology – 31,000 brush strokes per minute creates dynamic fluid action, which drives fluid forces deep into the interproximal spaces and along the gum line, delivering users a gentle, yet effective clean for healthier gums. Designed to make good oral health more accessible, the striking ProtectiveClean range has options to suit different price points and includes important features recommended by dental professionals and preferred by patients. Primary among them is a unique pressure sensor technology that alerts users when they are applying too much pressure. A two-minute timer helps patients brush longer. A brush head replacement reminder tracks the time and pressure a brush head has been used for alerting patients exactly when to replace their brush head, ensuring the toothbrush is always performing at peak performance.

To support the launch, Philips is working with industry experts, Dr Ben Atkins, clinical director of Revive Dental, and London Hygienist Anna Middleton to collect patient feedback and experience of using the New Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean. Collating user feedback and results from more than 50 previous manual toothbrush users over a four-week period, Ben and Anna found improved patient engagement with brushing, better brushing technique and a better clean when using ProtectiveClean.

Philips will expand their research over the summer, recruiting 1,000 manual toothbrush users from 100 dental practices across the UK to understand the impact of Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean on patient behavioural change and in achieving good oral hygiene.

The Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean toothbrush is proven to reduce gum disease by up to 100% and remove up to seven times more plaque than a manual toothbrush for improved oral health. The toothbrush uses unique technology and a sonic sweeping motion to create gentle microbubbles for an exceptional clean feeling.

For more information, visit <http://www.philips.co.uk/sonicare>



apply the same approach when asked about charcoal toothpaste. There is no evidence to prove its effectiveness for stain removal. In fact, it may even contribute to negative aesthetic effects, as the particles cracks in the teeth or restoration margins.

Ethical selling is essential.

All of us need to understand the possibilities

within dentistry – both from a 'practice profit' points of view as well as the management of patient expectations. There is an onus on all practice team members to discuss treatment options, whilst building a relationship and trust with each and every patient.

Images courtesy of photographer Steve Addo and hair/make-up by Netty Salmon.