

EDITORIAL

Softly, softly

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Softly, softly, catchee monkey is, apparently, a saying with an early 20th century heritage advocating caution or guile as the best way to achieve an end. It seems to me that it might well be applied to the once creeping and now overtly obvious uptake of digital applications in dentistry. In this case, perhaps ‘software, software, catchee monkey’ may be more apposite.

The development of technological solutions in the provision of dental care is in itself new in the sense that it isn't tied exclusively to the digital world. Advances such as the air rotor find their roots in engineering innovations, acid etching in car-body paint spraying and lasers in applied physics. These have each played their now obvious roles in moving us to the positions we occupy today in terms of efficient and effective patient care. Human nature, however, remains in what often appears to be a stubbornly reluctant attitude in which it resists change until forced to concede. If it is, as some suggest, part of our survival mechanism, it is ironic that in the course of employing that same instinct over the centuries we have not learnt to question it more. How often do we admit, when eventually yielding to try something new, that it is actually rather good and openly express a regret that we hadn't embraced it sooner? I guarantee that we can all think of several examples. Indeed, the literature supports this individual and institutional recalcitrance in mapping the inordinately long time it takes between research evidence of effectiveness and the general acceptance of its application.

This notwithstanding, I was drawn, while moderating sessions on recent webinars, to marvel at the extent of adoption of digital technology in dentistry. The 14th Dental Facial Cosmetic Conference, a pre-pandemic face-to-face event, was held virtually and attracted over 17,000 registrants from around the world, with at least 5,000 attending the sessions in which I participated (I declare no financial or other conflict of interest here). In passing, it is worth

noting that the application of distance learning through this technology is also now all but taken for granted in a way that was pooh-pooed by the vast majority just a handful of lockdown-years ago. What impressed me particularly were the contributions from three of our younger UK colleagues who spoke variously on periodontal health in aesthetic prosthodontics, pre-restorative alignment as part of minimally invasive cosmetic dentistry and maximising aligner success. One speaker was in the hospital service and the other two in private general dental practice. All three demonstrated very ably the remarkable results of the adoption of computer software in



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diagnosis, treatment planning, construction of appliances and restorations and the long-term maintenance of their patient care. These applications provided improved patient and clinician satisfaction, efficiency and results, but also clearly permitted the completion of far more complex cases, far more effectively than pre-digital procedures would have allowed.

Intra-oral scanning, image manipulation, data storage and improved communication across professional (clinician, team, technical) and patient (expectation, consent, legal) interactions are, frankly, quite amazing. I was about to write that these are showing us the future path but in reality this is Christmas Present and not Christmas Future. Also, it was super-inspiring to see young, optimistic, dedicated, ethical colleagues not pulled down by the current otherwise prevailing gloom about the state of dentistry but forging ahead with engagement and passion. Very heartening.

On which note, this being the final issue of the year provides the inevitable opportunity to reflect on 2022. While an inherent optimism within us all yearns for the year ahead to be better than the one that has just passed, some of the extraordinary developments in the previous twelve months could not possibly have been anticipated. The world spins on, yet the illegal, wholly unacceptable and aggressive invasion of Ukraine, soaring inflation, talk of recession, befuddled UK politics, faltering NHS dentistry and increasing climate change concerns have conspired to make this year memorable for many of the wrong reasons.

Whether we have snow falling softly

softly this festive season I would not dare to predict. But I do wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and Holiday Season appropriate to your individual beliefs and celebrations. In the same vein, I would not venture to prognosticate whether 2023 will prove to be any less of a tumultuous year. Nonetheless, I would like to wish all of our readers and all contributors, in their multitude of roles, the very best for a Happy New Year.

We have celebrated the *BDJ*'s 150th anniversary, achieved its highest ever Impact Factor and engaged increasing interaction in all of our publications. So, I offer a special vote of thanks both personally and on your behalf to the amazing team who bring you this journal, and the other five in the *BDJ* Portfolio, unflinching, with care and consummate professionalism issue after issue after issue. You are amazing – thank you all. ■

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