

ON CURRENT SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS IN DENTISTRY

All of us, to a greater or lesser extent, are continually exposed to new information in dentistry. Up-to-date information and continuous education are essential as knowledge and technology continue to advance. One traditional and simple way to keep abreast of the latest developments is to attend conferences and courses. This is less tiresome and certainly more interesting than reading dry systematic reviews at home or at work; conferences are social occasions and far more entertaining. In addition, presentations nowadays are loaded with pictures and videos, often with great music and special effects to rival even some Hollywood movies.

While this is in principle a very good thing, there are some underlying issues that need to be considered. Very often conferences are directly organised by dentistry industry manufacturers or run by scientific societies who inevitably depend on the same manufacturers for at least part of their funding. Hence, while the organization per se may be excellent, the content of the conference is guided by the sponsors to certain specific topics (e.g., digital dentistry, aesthetic dentistry) with the expectation of big profits, and therefore at risk of bias. The industry is driven by the desire to create new needs to sell more expensive products. Hence, sometimes prohibitive and often premature “solutions” are prioritized over well-established procedures. To make these presentations even more attractive, they focus on a few fantastical (if not miraculous) case reports, accompanied by pictures worthy of winning a photography contest and videos with stereo music and incredible special effects. I still remember one presentation beginning with squadrons of Avro Lancaster bomber planes roaring through the sky, releasing their lethal charge of bombs. It was digitally created and very realistic, but what was the point? To sell the latest generation of practice-based anti-aircraft weapons?

While there is nothing wrong with such a high level of artistic performance, there is something that we may be overlooking—the content. The style is masterfully taken care of, but what about the substance? Often there is insufficient information on the Materials and Methods, and the results are presented in their best light, with no complications reported. They only feature two or three magical reports of cases which may have occurred over the professional lifespan of the presenter. I would like to believe in miracles, but I do not want to be misled. I would rather solid content than spectacular special effects.

Indeed, if you are looking for special effects, why not go to see a 3D movie at some nice high-tech cinema? If, on the other hand, you are really interested in learning, well, you may need to think carefully and critically; you should make an effort to find a proper conference/course that does not merely tell you what you do but to achieve the best possible clinical results (or rather, to maximize the earnings of the sponsor).

I am not particularly worried about the older generations of dentists, many of whom had great teachers and have developed a critical eye, capitalizing on their own experience. However, I am very concerned about the younger generations and those to come. They are living in a virtual world of social media where, being constantly bombarded by infor-

mation, it is objectively more difficult to discriminate truth from lies. Literally anybody can spread disinformation, and the advent of artificial intelligence will make this problem even worse.

It would be unfair to attribute the causation link to sponsors and speakers alone, since they tend to provide the audience with what they think they want. The younger audience in particular should demand and learn to appreciate more balanced presentations proposing content based on evidence not on commercial gain.

A possible alternative solution? To read reports of well conducted clinical trials and unbiased systematic reviews. In this issue, for example, there are three randomized controlled trials to ponder. Despite their obvious and declared limitations, mostly linked to the ever insufficient sample size, they are presented with the aim of shedding light on debated matters in implantology. We hope they help you make informed decisions.

Happy reading.

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