

GUEST EDITORIAL

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater and secure your professional future

"Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" is a proverb that means you risk losing something fundamental and precious by performing reckless or distracted actions or by having a careless attitude. Why have I used this proverb to introduce this Editorial?

Digital technology has profoundly transformed the landscape of dentistry and has revolutionized the way dental care is delivered and experienced. Some examples include:

Digital dentistry: The adoption of digital technologies has revolutionized dentistry. Digital impressions, CAD/CAM technology for same-day crowns, and 3D printing have streamlined the design and fabrication of

dental restorations. Digital radiographs have reduced radiation exposure for patients and provided instant imaging for diagnostics.

Teledentistry: The rise of telehealth has extended to dentistry, allowing for remote consultations, follow-ups, and patient education.

Social media: This has emerged as a very powerful platform for connecting with current and prospective patients and disseminating educational content about oral health. Social media marketing has profoundly impacted the promotion of dental offices.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data: AI and big data analytics are being used to improve diagnostics, treatment planning, and patient management. These technologies help dentists to make more informed decisions and to predict patient outcomes.

All of this is expected to increasingly expand in the near future, beyond our broadest prediction.

Not long from now, computers will be able to analyze facial photographs or scans as well as 3D radiographs and be able to design a new smile and plan a treatment sequence. We are continually assessing this trend in order to understand its benefits and risks.



Andrea Ricci
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Why the leaf of a rubber tree on the cover?

Plants have developed a variety of ways to heal wounds throughout their evolutionary history. In the case of the rubber tree, injuries and cracks are sealed by curing the exuding lactic sap. The principle of rapid wound sealing by repair cells modeled on nature has been transferred to a bionic foam coating for pneumatic systems such as inflatable boats. Self-repairing materials can significantly extend the service life of technical products. They thus also contribute to resource conservation and sustainability.

Cover photograph:
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It is my personal opinion that these are just tools. They are neither good nor bad, and it is the way we utilize them that will make the difference. Hence, the proverb:

I strongly feel that we should be able to retain all the benefits (the “baby”) and manage the risks connected with the “impersonal” and “mathematical” approach (the “bathwater”) of digital technology.

Now, it is clear to me that there is a definite tendency to reduce the need for human input to optimize time and costs and to limit personal interpretation for the benefit of a presumed “objectivity” and “predictability.” The question that consequently arises is: What about our future as professionals?

I think that a modern dentist should be able to take advantage of digital technology (some aspects of which are still a little “immature”). However, to preserve what has already been achieved to date that is positive and effective, it is also crucial to understand the importance of the “human touch” in order to avoid machines taking over from humans in important aspects and phases of our profession.

While AI and automation can and already do play a significant role in dentistry, there are several aspects of dental care that are unlikely to be completely substituted by them; aspects of an intricate nature and/or where there are ethical considerations and a need for the human touch.

Some areas where dentists are expected to remain essential are:

Doctor–patient relationship: Building trust and rapport with patients, understanding their unique concerns, and providing emotional support are fundamental aspects of dental care that require human interaction. Patients often rely on the comfort and reassurance provided by their dentist.

Complex decision making: While AI can assist in the areas of diagnostics and treatment planning, complex cases often require nuanced decision making that considers a patient’s overall health and individual preferences as well as the potential complications. Dentists rely on their clinical experience and judgment in such situations.

Empathy and communication: Dentists need to convey complex information to patients in a way that is easily understood and tailored to the patient’s emotional state. Empathy and effective communication during the diagnosis, treatment planning and execution, and post-care discussions are vital for patient satisfaction and compliance.

Critical thinking and problem solving: Dentists often encounter unique and unexpected challenges during procedures. They must rely on their problem-solving skills and adaptability to navigate these situations safely and effectively.



It is easy to understand where I'm heading... dentists can significantly enhance their success with patients by cultivating and leveraging certain personal features and qualities, also known as "soft skills." Warm and empathetic behavior on the part of the dentist can go a long way to alleviate patient anxiety and build trust. Effective communication skills, combined with active listening, enable dentists to better understand patient concerns and explain procedures in a clear and empathetic manner. Demonstrating patience, compassion, and genuine care for each patient's well-being fosters a positive and lasting doctor-patient relationship.

To evolve our soft skills, we need to take our self-awareness to a higher level, continue to learn communication techniques, and optimize our "personal" characteristics. All this implies a very interesting journey within ourselves.

In addition to an important effect all this will have on the efficiency of our practices, the benefits will also manifest on a personal level, in our private lives.

These acquired or evolved soft skills are values that AI and digital technology will never be able to deliver!

Secure your future and enjoy your inner journey!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ARicci', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Andrea Ricci

