



Prosthodontics: a rich past and evolving future

A look at the history of prosthodontics demonstrates the profession's remarkable adaptability to contemporary needs and expectations. Moving from an earlier technical or mechanical approach, the profession has become a knowledge-driven specialty based on clinical diagnosis and problem-based care with prudent incorporation of technology. Through technological advances, evolving teaching methodologies, and continual research into the pathophysiology of oral diseases, we have developed innovative ways of looking at and treating dental diseases.

It is evident that cutting-edge technologies will be incorporated more and more in daily prosthodontic practice. Using digital imaging, computer image-based manipulation, precision fabrication, and placement of implants are already realities. In the near future, robotic prosthodontic restorative techniques are likely to emerge and even software for planning treatment will find practical application.

As technology-oriented practice becomes standard, it will be important to increase the outcome-research and revisit undergraduate and graduate teaching modalities. We must remember that we, as individuals and as professionals, remain responsible for maintaining quality control of our teaching institutions and our daily practice. We must remain vigilant, set appropriate professional standards, and adapt our existing systems for assessing competence.

However, technology should not – and in practical terms will not – supplant the need for clinical expertise. Moreover, as health care professionals who have undertaken certain

ethical obligations, the push cannot simply advance the profession in the abstract, it has to advance it in a real, tangible way from which all patients can benefit. Realistically, future innovations in the practice of prosthodontics will not reach all those who need it because of economic constraints and access issues. As has been the case in the past and persists in the present, while appropriate specialized treatment exists, it is not a real possibility for many people in society even in the wealthiest of nations. Even in the so-called developed countries, the availability and widespread use of advanced diagnostic and treatment options are far from uniform. Yet we live in a world where, in most places, poverty rates are on the rise and the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is growing. As such, it is reasonable to expect that, notwithstanding technical innovations, the “traditional” prosthodontic practices of the late 20th century, and yes, the conventional removable denture, will remain the core of prosthodontic practice. Part of our commitment to the advancement of our profession must be not only to maintain standards and develop avant-garde treatments, but also to ensure that the actual use of these methodologies and technologies is an option for everyone, regardless of their income or geographic location.

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