



Practice Makes Perfect



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In a recent editorial, Hupp¹ made the following observation regarding mastery of surgical procedures through repetition:

Scientifically sound studies of surgical outcomes and efficiency, as well as common observation, strongly support the premise that outcomes and efficiency improve in direct proportion to the number of procedures performed by the surgeon involved. The more often you do something, the better you get. This relates to both technical skill and surgical judgment. And, if the procedure depends upon team skills, the same premise holds true for surgical teams.

Obviously, this statement applies not only to surgical procedures, but to virtually any undertaking. In terms of clinical practice, the more often any clinical procedure is performed, the better the clinician's skills will become. The old adage, "practice

makes perfect," and the concepts of learning and experience curves hold true: As individuals and/or organizations gain more experience in performing a task, they usually become more proficient.

So how does this relate to esthetic dentistry? Nowadays, an increasing number of clinicians are performing clinical work related to esthetic dentistry. It is important that they evaluate their experience and skills and hence their ability to effectively treat their patients' esthetic problems. Too often esthetic dental procedures are performed without respect for or knowledge of the associated biologic effects. The results of such treatment are catastrophic. Maybe you have had patients come to your office with a bright white "veneer" smile: the gingiva is swollen and bleeding, the teeth are overcontoured, and the patient is miserable. Such outcomes can be avoided by careful treatment planning, which begins with a thorough examination of the patient to determine his or her current health sta-



tus and treatment expectations, with an emphasis on periodontal health, caries incidence, occlusion, possible orthodontic corrections, and esthetic and economic concerns. By first collecting this information and communicating with the patient, a written treatment plan can be developed, with preference given to the most conservative, noninvasive methods. Often, bleaching and partial direct bonding are all that are needed. If the dentition is badly worn or discolored or the patient has high esthetic expectations, then more extensive treatment, such as cosmetic recontouring, porcelain veneers, or crowns may be indicated. Clear communication with the patient regarding what is involved in and what can be accomplished by the various treatment options helps to ensure that the patient will be satisfied with both the treatment and its outcome. It is equally important, however, that the clinician be cognizant of every aspect of the treatment and whether he or she possesses the skills and knowledge required to treat the case successfully, or if further research or a team approach is needed.

When personal experience is lacking, clinicians must turn to research and the expertise of others to obtain the information they need to be successful. However, the validity of clinical studies is likewise influenced by the experience and skill of the researcher. The interpretation of study results

is therefore not always easy and sometimes can be misleading. Another challenge lies in the dynamic atmosphere of esthetic dentistry—new materials appear and techniques change so rapidly that it is sometimes difficult to keep up. Practitioners need to acquire a thorough knowledge of available methods and materials, learn their limitations, and master the required skills as new procedures are developed.

The European Journal of Esthetic Dentistry is dedicated to providing clinicians with sound clinical data and advice from experienced clinicians to help them achieve successful results as they build their own skills and expertise through practice and repetition. The journal addresses multidisciplinary topics and offers clinicians the opportunity to increase their knowledge through case presentations—of failures as well as successes—and treatment planning sessions from international experts in the field of esthetic dentistry. In addition, it offers readers the chance to explore recent innovations, network with colleagues, and find the inspiration, motivation, and information they need to maximize their potential.

Reference

1. Hupp JR. Mastery through surgical repetition [editorial]. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2006;101:1–3.