

Guest Editorial

The PowerPoint Generation

Dear Reader,

There are many ways to transfer or spread information to larger populations. It is one of the noblest tasks of a scientist. This also goes for dental science. Peer-reviewed, written material has been rated as the most reliable means of information, be it scientific or clinical, because only then can one critically judge what was done, how it was done, and evaluate how solid it is. It requires a lot of effort, dedication, and intellectual ingenuity to put all the information together. When this piece of information is also supported by the right statistical method, reliable, reproducible, valid methodology and – in the case of clinical studies – long-term observations, the value of the transferred information is much higher.

Older generations spent more time on clinical observations, and sharing knowledge and experience gained chairside. Among the younger generation, however, there is an increasing trend towards using visual media for this kind of information transfer, namely, PowerPoint presentations. If you have assembled some nice pictures in a PowerPoint presentation, showing beautiful teeth of ceramics or composites, implants, and photogenically lipsticked lips, and if you can also master the podium by being articulate, telling a few jokes, and starting or ending your PowerPoint presentation with some popular music, pretty scenery or animations, you are on the road to what's commonly considered success. Calculus and dirt are cleaned off in Photoshop or similar programs; spotless pictures are shown on wide screens, the audience applauds, and similar PowerPoint presentations follow one after the other. Such presentations even provide extra income on top of your regular wages, and soon you are a scientific popstar. In the majority of these proudly shown PowerPoint presentations, few if any actual cases are shown in the detail they deserve.

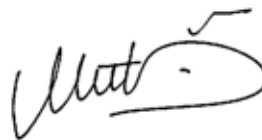
The speaker is surely proud of the result he or she achieved – comparable to natural teeth! – but how about

the longevity? Have they done any survival analyses? Who indicated and evaluated these restorations? How was bias avoided? How about periodontal conditions, biological or technical complications? When a salesman shows a PowerPoint presentation from a dental company without any scientific background, where is the dental literature and the results of many other studies? What about peer review?

Attending an increasing number of congresses and having seen thousands of similar lips, lipsticks and white teeth in PowerPoint presentations, I ask myself how many more times are we going to see and hear the same story? What do we really appreciate in seeing such PowerPoint presentations? What is actually innovative in these lectures? Aren't we mixing science with entertainment?

Certainly, one picture speaks more than a thousand words, and visual media can be grasped more quickly than others. PowerPoint is perhaps a perfect tool for didactic purposes, but my concern is that less and less time is spent on reading much valuable and sound information that is often not part of these PowerPoint presentations. Picture-based information unfortunately also shows up in some glossy so-called professional journals. The PowerPoint Generation should also refer to peer-reviewed information and longevity data, instead of focussing on spectacular pictures. Dental science is more than that.

Sincerely yours,



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