

The challenge of continuing dental education

The majority of practicing dentists are general practitioners; in the US, for example, only 20% of dentists are specialists in one of the accredited disciplines. General dental practitioners provide a wide range of treatments, including complicated procedures, and the decision of when to refer to a specialist is based on the dentist's skills and the case's complexity. In order to be able to provide high-quality care and to recognize when a referral could benefit the patient, general practitioners are expected to have knowledge and understanding of all the advances and innovations in oral health as well as familiarity and experience with new methods, equipment and tools.

To gain this knowledge, practitioners can use two main resources: peer-reviewed dental literature, and continuing dental education (CDE) courses offered by academic institutions, professional academies, private organizations, dental materials and equipment companies, as well as dental publishers. Often, the education provided includes hands-on experience that may be a valuable addition to the training.

Taking into consideration their busy schedule, dental practitioners have limited time for such activities, and the decision on what CDE courses to attend is not simple. Another limitation that reduces the number of CDE courses dentists can attend is the related expenses (cost and loss of revenue).

Dentists can and should gain a lot from CDE training, but also should understand its limitations.

I recently happened upon an advertisement for a CDE course promising that the attendees will learn over the course of a weekend how to perform full-mouth rehabilitation. I am sure that none of us would take this offer seriously.

Many organizations are nowadays offering online training, solely or as part of a larger training opportunity. Online training can provide better time flexibility and the ability to repeat the training multiple times, though it may have limited personal approach and hands-on opportunities.

The main reasons to select one CDE course over the rest most likely include the organization providing the training, the individual practitioner's previous experience, the topic presented, and sometimes the location where the course is offered. However, I believe that dental practitioners should develop a more organized approach for their CDE. One option can include progressing from simple to more complicated training, in areas of interest to the practitioner. On the other hand, general dental practitioners who perform a wide range of treatments should try to maintain their knowledge in all disciplines by attending courses on as many topics as possible.

Our profession requires continued learning; however, time limitations, costs, and the multitude of options for training offered, create a challenge for the practitioner. A multi-year plan that addresses the practitioner's interests as well as the continuous need for exposure to new methods and knowledge should help prepare us for future challenges. ■■

Eli Eliav
Editor-in-Chief

