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## Guest Editorial Continuing Dental Education on the Internet

Dental knowledge and acumen are no longer expanding along a linear curve; they are exploding exponentially. Clinicians need more immediate and interactive access to information about constantly evolving, innovative techniques and products. Dental education is being forced to meet this challenge by combining traditional learning methods with new technologies, including Internet-based resources.

New dental products and technologies have become exceedingly technique-sensitive. Be it the sequences and timing of dentin bonding, the subtleties of a suturing technique, or the nuances of an innovative grafting process, often these require more in-depth training than the traditional symposium lecture or peer-reviewed article can provide. While conventional print media and symposia remain effective at introducing practicing clinicians to new concepts, Internet-based learning sites with real-time streaming video allow a clinician to easily review in depth specific aspects of a particular procedure as often as necessary and at any time, even immediately prior to performing it. Their versatility lies in combining all the educational media—print, video, lecture—with the added ability to fast forward, skip, pause, or rewind as required. In addition to these interactive features, the sites can test the clinician on the information presented. It may be that the Internet has come of age as an essential educational resource, helping clinicians to assimilate information more easily and completely than ever before possible.

However, the clinician must exercise caution and evaluate these sites for bias and whether the information presented is substantiated as evidence-based data. The most important step is to consider the source. Initially most Internet-based educational sites were industry sponsored and therefore partial to a single teacher, philosophy of treatment, or product line, often excluding comparable ideas or technologies. However, today there are independent sites that bring together a vast array of global experts who showcase their talents on diverse techniques and products. Multidisciplinary and cross-referenced, these independent Internet sites are a veritable and comparable resource for both new and old information, irrespective of the manufacturer. The clinician is advised to seek out these types of sites and to take care to verify the information presented with another outside source.

With these caveats, the clinician can take advantage of the benefits of this technology, the greatest of which is the ability it provides clinicians to learn about a very specific aspect of a certain procedure rapidly and easily. The format is particularly versatile and ranges from presentations using static digital images to animations demonstrating a technique to real-time video showing live performance of clinical procedures. With the added feature of downloadable PDF files of related articles and detailed instructions and information on associated instrumentation or products, it becomes a comprehensive resource for any procedure, technique, technology, or product. It is an essential supportive adjunct to peer-reviewed journals and seminars to meet the accelerating pace of dental acumen and our constant need to remain current.

Today continuing education is a fact of life—the field of dentistry is constantly evolving, and we may well have to rethink the way we go about trying to keep up. The value of symposia and other meetings with their inherent benefits of face-to-face interaction and social activities will not diminish, and the merit of established, peer-reviewed print publications is likewise undeniable. However, to keep up with the fast pace of changing dental knowledge, independent, validated Internet-based learning sites will continue to grow as a valuable supplement to traditional educational media.

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