



Time to get back in the game

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the dental industry was forced to abandon most in-person meetings. Organisations had to provide their educational content through virtual platforms. Online educational programmes offered some advantages, including the convenience of being able to view content from home, the global reach of hearing from speakers from around the world, time flexibility in watching archived lectures, and cost savings due to not needing to or being able to travel. Many dental organisations have reported that they are still noticing a significant decrease in attendance at their in-person meetings. Continuing education credits are required for maintaining licensure and staying current in the dental field; however, dental practitioners must understand that attending meetings and lectures offers much more than merely an opportunity to obtain continuing education credits.

Studies have shown that humans are inherently social creatures that benefit both mentally and physically from social interaction. Attending a dental conference allows clinicians to escape the confines and distractions of the office and immerse themselves in an educational event. Although online education can provide excellent content, clinicians cannot obtain hands-on experience or take advantage of personal mentoring. In contrast, attending a hands-on course in person allows clinicians to learn new techniques and develop their manual skills using new equipment or materials under the guidance of an experienced expert. This format can help shorten the learning curve for better implementation of new techniques in practice. It can also help clinicians remain engaged with their learning and offer a fresh approach to treating patients. We must never stop learning.

In-person meetings provide clinicians with a unique opportunity to connect with like-minded colleagues, foster relationships and expand their professional network for future collaboration.

Face-to-face interactions build rapport and allow for more in-depth communication than in a virtual setting. Clinicians can review challenging clinical cases and discuss practice operations to learn from and exchange ideas with other dental professionals. This can provide new perspectives on patient care and efficient running of the office. Most speakers at dental meetings are willing to interact with the attendees and answer questions. Conferences also usually include social functions where participants can catch up with old friends and meet new colleagues. Some dental practitioners may bring members of their office to foster teamwork and motivate the staff; this can improve synergy within the office. If time allows, conferences and meetings may also present an opportunity to explore a new country or city and take advantage of the visit.

A further benefit of attending meetings in person is that it enables practitioners to stay informed about the latest trends and gain insight into current and emerging technologies. It also helps them to remain up to date with best practices and how to implement evidence-based dentistry. In the exhibit hall, attendees can speak to dental vendors to learn about new products and materials. The company representatives have been trained to explain and demonstrate their products as well as answer any questions. They can also provide names of clinicians who are currently using their products for additional feedback. Developing a personal relationship with a company can also improve communication and implementation of their products. In addition, special pricing is usually applied for products sold at meetings, so there is a potential cost benefit to be gained if buying new equipment.

I often find that I can learn just as much at a meeting from collaborating and communicating with other colleagues during a meal, coffee break or social function as I can in the lecture hall.

I enjoy exchanging knowledge and ideas with like-minded clinicians who share my passion. I personally find that attending a live event provides a boost of renewed energy and focus that I then bring back to my office to encourage a “seize the day” attitude and offer improved patient care. I hope to see a trend towards increased attendance at dental conferences. It is indeed time for all dental practitioners to get back in the game and learn.



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