

Implementing digital photography offers numerous benefits

When Pictures Really Matter

When we say that “a picture is worth a thousand words,” we mean that a visual presentation conveys information more effectively than words can alone. Many people are more responsive to visual cues, which can elicit a myriad of feelings, such as joy, sadness, and curiosity. There are many important clinical reasons to utilize digital photography in our dental practices, but it is the emotional impact of those photographs that guides the decision-making process for the people who trust us with their care: our patients.

Excellence in dentistry requires a wide variety of skills—both in science and in artistry. We begin our education in dental school by learning the clinical aspects of care and how to correctly treat our patients. As we transition into practice, we learn the complex business of dentistry and become competent in other areas, including information technology, marketing, and treatment acceptance. When compared with the other skills that clinicians are required to master, digital photography can be easily learned and smoothly implemented into clinical practice.

The routine use of clinical photography in a dental practice provides many benefits. In the dental record, detailed documentation is critical. Photographs can sometimes serve to show or describe a condition that is not evident radiographically or that cannot be adequately described with detailed, written chart notes. This results in a more thorough medicolegal record. They can also be used to directly communicate clinical findings to the patient. Photographs taken during a procedure document any complications or unexpected problems, allowing the patient to easily see why a change in treatment may be necessary. When reviewing a case in my practice, the photographic information is often used to confirm the written and radiographic documentation.

Digital photography is invaluable in accurately diagnosing conditions and treatment planning proper function and esthetics. For example, the first step in treatment planning is to determine the proper maxillary incisal edge position, both horizontally and vertically. Although this seems to be a simple task, it cannot be done without understanding the soft-tissue variables, such as lip dynamics, gingival architecture, and lip closure paths. A stone model cannot convey that information for treatment planning; however, just a few photographs contain all of the

information necessary to evaluate the soft tissue as well as the location of the occlusal plane and any skeletal issues. When we address our patient’s dentofacial concerns, it can be much more difficult—if not impossible—to assess and plan the integration of the tooth and lip positions, arch form, and alignment in the face without photographs.

Once the final esthetic outcome is determined, precise communication with the dental laboratory is necessary for successful case completion. Written prescriptions only provide a limited amount of the information needed by the laboratory, but a photograph completes the communication by facilitating integration of the objective measurements with the face and soft tissue. Shade, translucency, and fluorescence can be matched much more precisely with a photograph than a drawing or written explanation. Photographs allow the technician to truly “see” the patient, the existing conditions, and the desired outcome.

Finally, implementing photography into your practice can grow your business. High quality images can help create your brand, setting your office apart from the many others in your area. External marketing efforts are enhanced when people who are unfamiliar with your practice see images from your cases. People are drawn to photographs on your website, which also enhances your professional image. Your existing patients’ positive attitudes are reaffirmed when they see beautiful

postoperative images displayed throughout your office. Their curiosity may be piqued, and they may begin to wonder if their smile could look as good as that image on the wall or the computer monitor. These images provide powerful internal marketing.

Learning about and integrating digital clinical photography into your practice’s routine offers many benefits—from more predictable clinical outcomes and enhanced marketing to comprehensive documentation and more. It is also a powerful daily reminder of the joy that we feel when new smiles are created. After the completion of every smile design case, our office takes celebration photographs. Patients are sent a link to download them, and many express that one has become their favorite, often noting that they now use it as their profile picture

on social media. Whether or not a picture is worth a thousand words, it is clearly worth many smiles.



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