Are you prepared for dentistry’s tech revolution?

Dentistry is undergoing rapid change.

Spiraling demand for dentistry services is leading to overstretched budgets. This is prompting The Government and Insurance industries to look for ways to better rationalise costs.

Thanks to a rapid expansion in patient data over recent years, driven by new technology, new regulatory requirements and an ageing population, we now know much more than ever before about dental needs in the community.

With new data-driven insights and by leveraging these new technologies, the ability exists to generate significant efficiencies.

That’s good news for the entire industry.

We also live in the age of unprecedented patient access to information. Patients are now much more proactive in monitoring all aspects of their health, including their dental health. This is prompting many patients to demand more dental health services than in the past, driving up costs.

## New Funding Models

In both developed and developing economies, newly evolving funding models are helping instigate a shift towards outcomes-driven dentistry.

In outcomes-driven healthcare, health systems focus on reducing variation in how they treat a wide variety of diseases and conditions. This process requires all clinicians to provide accurate diagnoses and treatment algorithms to improve patient outcomes.

According to Harvard Business School, an outcomes-driven approach will place the patient at the centre of dentistry and change the very nature of how dental treatments are developed and provided.

In Australia, we’ve already seen this shift begin with consumer-driven funding models, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care reforms.

## Higher Patient Expectations

With access to more data and better technology, patients are becoming more discerning and demanding, increasing the pressure on practitioners to change the way they work.

As a dental practitioner, your response to this evolving landscape will determine not only the future success of your practice, but your ability to achieve your own personal financial and lifestyle goals.

In the past, dentists could be confident that their personal financial situation would remain secure, freeing them to focus on treating their patients.

Now, patient care is no longer the only concern a dentist has. It’s increasingly important for dentists to operate a sound business model to ensure the long-term viability of their practice.

### Challenges

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**The Rise of Artificial Intelligence**

For many, Artificial Intelligence (AI) conjures up visions of robots and computers rendering humans redundant.

The reality, however, is that AI is already here.

As we speak, AI is saving lives. It is revolutionising the entire world of healthcare. And it’s just getting started!

As an example of AI saving lives, consider the Toronto-based company Cloud DX.

Cloud DX is leveraging the power of large data sets and machine learning to identify tuberculosis, pneumonia and bronchitis. This is achieved by detecting subtle differences in the sounds of coughs. By analysing millions of coughs, AI systems are able to detect very subtle differences in coughs which help identify patients that have specific illnesses.

While some professionals express concerns about the reliability of AI-powered diagnoses, Japanese researchers recently demonstrated that a computer-assisted system is capable of identifying and analysing polyps found during a colonoscopy in less than a second with 86% accuracy.

Beyond the world of diagnostics, AI-powered automation is proving to be a game changer in surgical wards.

A staggering 40 percent of robots currently sold worldwide are designed for surgical purposes.

Every year the number of robotic surgeries is increasing by 30 percent. More than 1 million Americans have undergone robotic surgery.

One example is the da Vinci robot. This has revolutionised prostate surgeries. As many as 80 percent of prostate surgeries are now automated using some form of robotic technology such as the da Vinci robot.

Such revolutionary developments are headed towards dentistry in coming years.

## Thriving into the Future

So, what will it take to thrive as a dentist in the future?

How will dentists be able to build their business with all the changes that are afoot?

Being a great dentist is no longer just about practicing dentistry well.

In the future, successful dentists will need to be both entrepreneurial and forward-thinking. They will need to embrace new technologies and learn to work with them.

***As a dentist, you’ll need to focus on three key areas:***

***Efficiency, People and Finance.***

To be effective, dentists must now be adept at managing business operations, technology, staffing, legal issues and regulatory requirements.

However, entrepreneurial and business management skills are not taught in professional training. It’s essential you develop these skills.

Our research shows that personal and business finances are key priorities for dentists.

The most logical path to achieving financial freedom and wealth creation as a dentist is through building an efficient practice and nurturing skilled people.

That means focusing on both business growth and improving profitability – working smarter, not harder.

However, this is easier said than done.

In a sector that places a premium on reliability, dental practices are often run on out-of-date systems and business practices, increasingly impacting the patient experience, practitioners’ work-life balance, and business profitability.

The good news is that data and technology can transform these outdated models to significantly improve both patient and business outcomes.

## Technology Adoption

Healthcare has been one of the slowest industries to embrace new technology, with the lowest uptake of cloud-based services of any industry except agriculture.

In our survey, only 11% of respondents cited business technology as a priority.

Many dentists continue to face real challenges in acquiring and integrating technology.

## The ‘As-A-Service’ Revolution

Starting in the late 2000s, businesses started developing software solutions that could be licensed to other companies. Rather than each company building its own computer software platforms, which was both time-consuming and costly, they could simply rent a version of the software that was built and maintained by professionals.

The “As-A-Service” trend has benefitted many industries, with the latest innovation being “Mobility-As-A-Service”.

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## Can Dentistry Rent Technology and Equipment Without Ownership?

A funding model that could suit dentists would be to rent technology and equipment.

With rapid advances in technology, purchasing would entail significant expenditure on equipment that could quickly become redundant.

A preferable way for those that seek to best manage their ‘life cycle asset management’, could be the rental model.

In such circumstances, the practice could use the equipment while needed and then have the option to upgrade to newer technology at the end of the lease term.

With equipment and technology rapidly evolving, an initial lease agreement for 3 - 5 years would be ideal for this funding model.

Even though some equipment will last longer, with wear and tear it will start to break down, causing downtime for the practice - affecting client retention and income.

This solution would fund:

* Dental / IT Equipment
* Installation & Removal / Decommission
* Preventative Maintenance
* Validation Code update charges
* Consumables
* Warranty Travel Charges
* Extended warranty options

Dentists should be able to claim 100% of these payments plus claim GST of each payment as an input credit of your Quarterly BAS (subject to their accountant’s advice).

The end of term gives clients multiple options:

* Return the equipment with no further obligation, allowing dentists to update as required
* Make an offer to purchase equipment outright at an agreed market value, which helps avoid any downtime for the practice
* Continue to rent the equipment beyond lease term pending an important upgrade or technology change that is imminent.

Contact your dental equipment supplier today for further information!

**References**

1. Macquarie Healthcare Business pulse check report 2018.
2. Towards 2030 – Exposing the 8 Megatrends that will dominate the coming decade by Michael McQueen.