Increasing your digital influence

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, on how their major campaign is going digital

For practice owners, associates and the whole dental team, these are unprecedented and challenging times. These uncertainties will continue over the coming weeks and months. The impact is being felt by all. It is affecting our own livelihoods while restricting how we can provide support to patients.

Our charity is not immune. Much of the work we do in local communities like schools, workplaces and care homes has all come to a halt. For the first time, we have had to approach providing oral health promotion and education with severe limitations regarding face-to-face contact. It has also had a significant impact on our biggest campaign – National Smile Month.

The Oral Health Foundation recognises the significant strain being placed on the dental profession. Through National Smile Month, we will help you maintain strong relationships and communicate effectively with your patients.

National Smile Month is the UK's largest and longest-running oral health promotion campaign. Every year it is supported by around 5,000 dental teams. Many of these host in-practice activities and put on events in their local communities. It has a tremendous value in improving oral health education and helping dental teams form stronger relationships with local people and community groups.

That's why we need National Smile Month now, more than ever before.

As well as giving the nation a reason to smile in these difficult times, the need for us to provide guidance on how to achieve a healthy mouth still remains. It also gives you a chance to continue doing what you love.

That's why we are proud National Smile Month will still be going ahead. With health and safety being of the utmost importance, the campaign will take on a different form and will be entirely digital.

Your involvement is integral to the campaign's success and we hope you will join us from 18 May as we look to continue

championing oral health in a different way.

Over the course of the last decade, the internet has increasingly been used as a source of health information. Convenience, ease of access and speed of delivery give you an insight into why.

Technological advances have made it easier for us all to navigate this troublesome period. It's provided a way for people to keep in touch with their loved ones and to gain vital information about the ongoing pandemic.

However, these same advances have also made it easier for misinformation to spread, and quickly.

It's vital that all members of society are aware of how they can stay safe and ensure the safety of those around them. Misinformation around COVID-19 puts these values at risk and our role of helping our local communities maintain good health and hygiene subsequently becomes more important.

Social media platforms, while beneficial in their own respective ways, can unfortunately be a breeding ground for spreading misinformation on a variety of topics, many of which pose a threat to the wellbeing of millions.

We can combat this and use these platforms throughout National Smile Month to promote key information which will help people achieve a better quality of life, through great oral hygiene.

During National Smile Month, we want to promote the importance of good oral health and how it can lead to a better quality of life. You can help us promote brushing and diet advice, and how good oral health can lower your risk of systemic diseases. We also know maintaining great oral hygiene can play a significant part in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

There are some very simple, safe and effective ways for you to play a key part in National Smile Month.

Updating your website can be a great start. Many people in your local community will be familiar with your website from previous experiences. During this time where you

are unable to see the vast majority of your patients, you can give them a place to go for reliable and expert information on maintaining great oral hygiene.

Make the most out of your practice (or organisation's) website and help your patients achieve a healthy smile from a safe distance away.

Ensure there is continuity between your website and any social media profiles your practice may have. Clear links from one to the other gives further security and assurance to patients that are looking for reliable information.

Following from this, platforms like Facebook and Twitter are a great way to build rapport and maintain two-way dialogue with people in your area. When used correctly and consistently, social media platforms give you an insight into what information your audience wants. This allows you to tailor your activity to address their needs. Organising a live stream on social media could also allow your patients to put forward questions about their oral health to a dental professional.

You may find that many people in your local area struggle with a particular aspect of oral health and addressing this could form the majority of your activity during the campaign.

Those new to social media may find that through utilising it, you access a whole new audience that may not have benefited from your activity during National Smile Month otherwise.

Social media accounts and other online platforms make collaboration with other like-minded campaigners easier too. A local business may benefit from having a dental expert give an online workshop on sugar, smoking, alcohol and their various impacts on oral health.

The possibilities are endless and during this time, we really encourage you to get creative. Find fun ways to have maximum impact on your local residents and be a shining light during this dark time.

Help us lead the nation towards a healthier future and together we can bring back a smile for the nation.

For more information regarding National Smile Month and to access digital resources, visit www.smilemonth.org ♦ <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41404-020-0394-8>