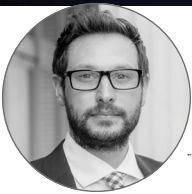


The visual element



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There are multiple ways and methods of learning, assimilating and absorbing new information. I've always been a visual learner – you can tell me a million times how to do something and you may as well have told my cats, but show me once and I'm set for life. In retrospect, it's probably why as a child I'd watch *Blue Peter* closely and subsequently get confused and/or lose interest when they'd say, 'here's one I've done earlier.' As a result, current day me and *YouTube* tutorials get along very well.

This all made one evening in November rather intriguing when my colleague and I made the short trip to the Everyman cinema in King's Cross for the premiere of *A Smile Is Born*, a feature length film showing one patient's journey through his smile makeover.

At this point, I'd half expect a significant portion of you to roll your eyes at the phrase 'smile makeover', given that's the bread and butter of the profession – a scale and polish, for example, could well be seen as a smile makeover, given it will undoubtedly improve the patient in question's smile. Keep with me.

Featuring Dr Martin Wanendeya and Dr Nina Shaffie, *A Smile Is Born* followed the patient journey of Luke, a journey that combined some intricate, time-sensitive implant and orthodontic treatment in an advanced digital workflow. If I told you that I'd essentially watched a feature film about

dentistry and loved it, you may think I'd started early on the festive tipples.

Alas, that's exactly what happened. It was the first opportunity I'd had to see how the sausage was made. *Facebook* and *Instagram* are both platforms full of interesting pictures showing smile makeovers, but both are selective. Both platforms are what the practitioner wants you to see. Both platforms don't pull back the curtain on how difficult the transformation in question was; it's your before and after pictures with words and the practitioner's explanation left to fill in the gaps.

This was different, and it made me think about how younger and newly-qualified dentists are absorbing their information and the associated pitfalls. I'm being told – in various settings, by various high-profile voices, and by practitioner's themselves – that dentists are turning to video tutorials for their case learning. *Instagram* reels and *TikTok* highlights are increasingly being spoken of as the 'go to' for how to perfect techniques, not to mention learning them in the first place.

As an editor and representative of a portfolio of printed journals, needless to say I have my reservations about this. Again, it's how the sausage is made. The *BDJ*, for example, undergoes a rigorous peer-review process. This publication balances the commissions of experts in their field with carefully considered submissions. There's a process, and when authors submit to the portfolio, they know what to expect, and readers know they can rely on the process to deliver them the requisite quality necessary to keep them out of the grasp of *Fitness to Practise* concerns.

Can you really say the same applies to *TikTok*? The posting practitioner becomes

judge, jury and executioner in a sense – they decide to select the case, what photos they wish to use and the narrative to go alongside it. There's no warts-and-all; there's no sense of what challenges there were. In Dr Wanendeya and Dr Shaffie's case, the challenges were laid bare: the patient had a fairly tricky timescale for them to work to, logistical challenges of communicating across practices and platforms alongside the usual mix of challenges the case itself presented. You got to see the decision-making process. You got to see the challenges. You got to see the bits you don't normally see on *Instagram* or *TikTok*. You got to see – and learn – how the integration between digital dentistry and lab works on a practical level. It wasn't the simplistic before and after.

More to the point, it provided a timely reminder of the value of high-quality sources of information. Perhaps it's the best way the current generation assimilates and absorbs information, but the pitfalls involved with learning from unverified sources really isn't worth the risk. You need to know the ins and outs, the warts-and-all. It's how you learn, and how you become the highly-skilled practitioners you are.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but in the case of dentistry, I'm not sure I agree. Times are changing, and education will need to keep up with the platforms available for practitioners to hone their skills. And yet, in an ever-changing world, there remains a constant theme, and that's the need for the full picture, for the detailed explanation, for the how-to. ♦

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