

AND ANOTHER THING...
Roger Matthews

Is it just me? Recently I bought a new camera – nothing swish, none of your intra-oral long-lens macro thingies. A ‘compact’ – though obviously not designed with gentlemen’s jacket pockets in mind. Probably designed for one of my wife’s ‘compact’ handbags (but that’s another story).

In common with many recent purchases - I’ll tell you about my DVD Recorder another time – this has arrived with only the barest of essentials to advise on its use. You know the sort of thing: “Open box, check contents, charge battery...”, and, of course, a CD containing the actual user manual. In this case, a modest 240 pages.

Two hundred and forty? Even allowing for the fact that the first ten pages are filled with useful tips, like not plugging yourself into the wall socket, iron the camera or put it in a dishwasher, this is one heck of an online read. Maybe in the distant future of retirement, I will finally get around to reading the finer details of editing the audio track on my HD movies...

Anyway, there are three things I have taken away from this little adventure in domestic electronics. Firstly, hasn’t everything got complicated? Secondly, are we being encouraged (selectively bred in Darwinian terms) to use less of our brain-power? And thirdly, dentistry isn’t the only thing being regulated these days.

Complexity, then. Things have to do lots of additional activities these days, in the name of competition, saleability and general one-upmanship. Your practice software now calculates your daily output, UDAs, turnover and percentage of surgery time unaccounted for by any known procedure (chatting to patients isn’t included).

While helpful on occasions, I’m fairly convinced that few practices ever use more than 10% of the functionality they have paid for.

Or take etch and bond. I’m just waiting for one that actually inserts the required thickness of restorative or turns a different colour if you’ve dehydrated the smear layer. It probably exists.

Patients must be amazed, bored or possibly sleepy once you've explained all the alternatives, benefits and risks of the various approaches to their presenting condition. Should the consent-ologists ever get to enquiring exactly what you say to each patient, then the rumoured 16-page legal form used prior to removing third molars in the US will become a reality here, too.

On to brain-power. I'm a bit uncertain here. Is it that putting a user manual on a CD actually requires *more* brain-power (switch on PC, insert disc, navigate through menu and contents – let alone actually sitting there are absorbing the information from the screen), or are the aforesaid warnings about not using your purchase on a bonfire depriving us of all thought and reasoning?

Having spent the last nine months answering queries on regulatory bodies, guidelines and policies, I am struck by the apparently spreading conviction that a generic protocol can be written and supplied for such things as opening up the practice in the morning, or ensuring that the takings match the till roll.

Finally on to regulation, or should I say over-regulation. There is absolutely no doubt that we're in an over-regulated profession. But I would suggest that we're in common with much of the rest of the world outside dentistry – certainly throughout healthcare.

I'm fortunate (some would say unfortunate) to be on a circulation list for the latest in regulatory and technical updates supplied by the British Dental Trade Association. Its writer does – and has done for many years – an incredible job in keeping members informed of the goings-on (usually in Brussels).

You will be relieved to know, I'm sure, that disclosing tablets are not to be classified as medical devices. But I wonder how many person-hours were involved in coming to that weighty conclusion?

And I know just how many technicalities and regulatory niceties are involved in other pursuits, such as the worlds of advertising, banking and the brewing industry (thanks to none of my sons wanting to enter the world of dentistry after they saw the effect it had on their Father). It's just as bad, believe me.

[675 words]

Notes to Editors:

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Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.