

Profitable Minimal Intervention in Practice

The concept of Minimal Intervention (MI) dentistry has been around since the early 1990s, setting up strong foundations for the kind of dentistry we practice today. Roger Matthews, Chief Dental Officer at Denplan discusses the latest developments in MI dentistry and gives his thoughts on how dental professionals can make it profitable in practice.

Modern preventive dentistry is no longer about damage limitation or surgical repair – it's about the optimal preservation of healthy natural tooth tissue for a lifetime. The benefit to the patient lies in better oral health through proactive prevention, rather than reactive symptom relief, not to mention better aesthetics, which is a key consideration in today's consumer-driven environment.

However, the idea of MI is often difficult to promote to both existing and prospective patients, as there can be the misconception that they could potentially be paying to have less treatment. The following information is designed to not only give you some ideas about how to tackle these misconceptions, but how to promote MI more effectively so that it becomes a more profitable business enterprise.

Early Diagnosis

I think we would all agree that prevention is better than cure and in order for caries to be prevented at the earliest possible stages we, as dentists, can today carry out a range of diagnostic tests. Testing for saliva flow-rate and *S.mutans* can help in assessing the patient's risk of caries, but I always found that nothing can replace a frank and open discussion about diet, sugar consumption and the frequency in which someone eats. This is particularly helpful when your initial history showed an increased risk of caries and can then be followed up by the pH and oral bacteria tests, to help patients' understand where they may be going wrong.

Education is a key part of MI dentistry and opening up the channels of communication with your patients is invaluable. A short interview or checklist before a consultation can not only highlight problems that the patient may be having, but by modifying your questions, you may be able to assess changes in diet, how much fluoride a patient is exposed to, their general lifestyle and any underlying medical conditions. This can all help build a picture of where improvements can be made or what kind of dental issues that patient may be more susceptible to.

MI Techniques

Assessment and co-diagnosis with your patient are both important steps in MI dentistry and certainly require the most skill, but sometimes treatment is necessary and MI is all about knowing when *not* to drill, which requires much more knowledge and experience!

Early signs of caries can be detected through the traditional method of mirror and light as well as radiographs, but there are plenty of new developments out there to aid early detection and further enhance successful MI. These include improvements in laser and light-induced fluorescence, as well as far better magnification and imaging tools.

However, I still believe that the most effective method of prevention is infection! You can not only 'infect' your patients with the enthusiasm and desire to keep their teeth healthy, but by showing them the amazing range of MI procedures now available - from adhesive tooth-coloured restoratives, to air-abrasion preparation, casein phosphate for decay reduction and saliva risk analysis – it's far more likely that they will come to realise that prevention is both possible and beneficial.

To show its support for MI dentistry, Denplan has partnered with Oral B to launch a series of MI seminars designed to work with dentists to keep them ahead of the curve. Expert guest speakers include Dr Avi Bannerjee from Guys Dental School and Dr Louis MacKenzie of Birmingham Dental School, who will be looking at the evidence base for MI and discussing the use of MI dentistry in a profitable dental practice. Seminars also include hands-on interactive sessions by leading manufacturers Oral-B, GC-UK and Velopex – providing valuable technical support for delegates.

Making MI Profitable

At the end of the day, patients should be paying for their dentist to keep them healthy. Unfortunately the misconception about MI Dentistry is that they will be paying for less treatment and therefore care. I think the information above has demonstrated that this is certainly not the case, but how can dentists tackle the idea?

Firstly, using the MI message can really help to differentiate the service and support you offer to your patients. Positioning all the work you do as the most contemporary, evidence-based dentistry can not only put your existing patients at ease and boost satisfaction, but also triggers new patient enquiries. Furthermore, by keeping your current patients - capitation patients in particular - healthy, you're reducing the need for larger, more complex restorations – and the subsequent cycle of replacement, and therefore driving down incurrent costs.

It's also important to remember that you're not alone in all this. By making MI dentistry a priority in the practice you can use the whole team to deliver care, positive messages and information, as well as to monitor patients' health status. The patient also understands that they are responsible for their own oral health and, by working together as a practice to deliver appropriate knowledge and understanding, you can minimise the risk of complaints or claims.

MI dentistry has the potential to allow dentists to apply a more conservative approach to caries treatment and preserve healthy tooth structure. It can also highlight the friendly, health-oriented treatments your patients receive from your team and help to increase patient retention and, ultimately, growth. I believe that MI is the future of dentistry and that dentists should be rewarded for undertaking fewer invasive treatments. Although this may seem like wishful thinking...who knows what the future may hold?

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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.