

TALK TO ME! **Roger Matthews**

Communication in an electronic age is, it seems to me, getting extraordinarily difficult. At the same time, we have so many additional ways of talking to one another – or to the world - that you would think the whole process of conveying information, learning or feelings would be greatly simplified.

Blogs, twittering, social networking, e-mails, webinars: you name it, we have it. Book-selling as a high street business is under threat, with the advance of the internet, Amazon.com and even a device that will print off a copy of any book in print for you at the touch of a button.

Is it me (shades of grumpy old mannerisms here) or is it that communication has actually become much more, well, solitary? I heard a lecturer say yesterday that he hates speaking to young dental audiences, because they spend so much time texting or e-mailing in the lecture theatre. And every parent knows how much time their offspring will, if left to their own devices, spend on instant messaging or social networking sites, all whilst closeted away in their bedroom.

The telly was supposed to have been the death knell of conversation (and, no doubt, ‘the wireless’ before that), but in my childhood at least, families watched together and discussed – yes we actually talked about – the programmes. Now there’s a screen in every room and a channel for every taste.

I’m writing this because the latest *GDC Gazette* highlights conduct cases which, once again, feature lack of communication between dental professionals and patients. It’s surely now almost a cliché to say that the majority of healthcare complaints come down to a lack of communication. But it’s still true.

Sometimes it seems it’s the very noise of the frantic networks that blunts both a patient’s receptiveness to advice and information, and the ever increasing pace of practice life that deters professionals from taking the time to sit and discuss with patients.

Dental schools place great importance on communication skills and rightly so. But I fear that all the extra time to deliver preventive dentistry – and surely about 75% of that is about communication – that was promised prior to 2006 just hasn't materialised.

Good dentistry is not cheap, but bad dentistry is exorbitant. Moreover, it costs the dentist and the dental team even more than the patient. There's irony for you. Time to talk, to understand, to advise and to learn is so often the difference between the two.

We need to be more generous in our communication, and more so in a time when communication seems to be becoming more selfish. If you can't afford such generosity, ask yourself: is your manner of practice such as to prevent "talk time"? If so, then think on, it could be you who ultimately pays the price.

Notes to Editors:

Roger Matthews MA BDS DGD (UK) FDSRCS(Edin) - Chief Dental Officer

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.