

## Reality TV: “You are what you see you eat”

By Laurelyn Higgins, RDH

**T**echnology tools are everywhere. Children deftly play with their computer games or watch the latest DVDs in the backseat of the family car; young people listen to their iPods or digital audio players as they saunter down the street; baby boomers flaunt the latest in diabetes home monitors and everyone but everyone has a mobile phone. Then there are those of us who watch “You Are What You Eat” on television, fascinated by the people, Dr Gillian and the big picture at the defining moment: a significant emotional event for all involved including the audience.

The other day in my treatment room my hygiene coordinator and I were rescheduling our new patient for her continuing

since that technology exists, why not make better use of it to serve our patients.

Since the printing and mailing costs of practice newsletters can be significant what better way to reach patients than with an e-mail newsletter. These newsletters can be used to educate patients about new research and products as well as to market the practice and its people, services and procedures. They can be tailored to life cycles, the seasons and events as well as demographic groups. For example e-mails close to Melbourne Cup Race day, Christmas Day or Mother’s Day can offer breath treatment, whitening services or airflow stain removal as part of a grooming quickie for party people. When a new product such as Closys11 is

number home computers; people carry them everywhere in purses or on belts. At SMILE Dental I am asking caries-risk patients to use the camera built into the mobile phone to take pictures of the meals and snacks (see Figure 1) that they have had and send them or mms (multi-media message service) them to me. It’s far easier for the patient to take a picture than take the time to write everything down in a food diary. A digital camera would work just as well (and maybe give a better picture according to camera buffs) but may not be as handy at meal-times. I then send back a dental critique and suggestions for changes and improvements via phone/e-mail or make an appointment to chat with them.

Anyone who has seen the television show “You Are What You Eat” where Dr Gillian meets people who are slowly killing themselves with fast foods will get the picture. What Dr Gillian does is display all the food they have eaten for the week to visually shock them. The picture, which horrifies people, is a very powerful tool, a visual tool. So why not use the mobile phone to let dental patients see what they are eating, as well as a quick means of communication with someone like myself?

And speaking of pictures how many practices use an intra oral camera to show patients what they see? The intra oral camera is no gimmick - it is the most useful piece of technology that we have to educate our patients. Patients see what we are saying and believe what they are hearing. It creates better case acceptance, builds trust and adds to the overall image of the practice. Every staff member in the practice should be trained to utilize the camera for superior patient education. I certainly wouldn’t be without it; it’s a great diagnostic tool as well.

Other high tech tools such as the automatic blood pressure monitor (see Figure 2) have become an invaluable tool in the dental practice. Taking vital signs is part of the health history, which prepares us to treat the patient, but I’ve seen this technology do much more. It provides better patient care due to more awareness by prompting the patient to see their physi-



Figure 1. Snack foods

care appointment in six months time. When Amelia informed the patient that she would be contacting her two weeks prior to the appointment to confirm the reserved time, the businesswoman replied “only by e-mail please; I prefer that no one in this practice contact me by telephone”. That statement and the television program about diet shock tactics got me to thinking about the uses of modern technologies besides confirming dental appointments. Patients today equate technology with advanced clinical skills and modern practice philosophies. Technology is allowing people to communicate more easily and

launched at a practice, e-mails can be sent to inform patients about its availability and success: one of the most advanced technologies in oral care. E-mail newsletters can be created to coincide with Diabetes Awareness Month. This will raise patients’ awareness of the connection between diabetes and periodontal disease to encourage them to see their dentist and hygienist for an examination and advice that could save their life.

To go a step further, nowadays nearly everyone carries a mobile phone so why not use this technology to deliver dental health care? Mobile phones far out-



Figure 2. Blood pressure monitor

cian. It supports the hygienist's philosophy of oral health/total body wellness. I've personally seen the response from patients when I've showed them the numbers then explained the apparent connection between periodontal disease and the heart. I've seen periodontal patients finally take flossing seriously once they saw numbers that concerned them. I recall a businessman for whom the standard phrases such as "you only have to floss the teeth you want to keep" and "did you know that the toothbrush only cleans 65% of the tooth and the floss cleans 35%?" were meaningless until he saw the numbers.

So when you begin gathering your medical and dental history information why not ask the patient's permission to take their blood pressure; to use the intra

oral camera after the preliminary hygiene examinations to show them what you see; to use their mobile phone or digital camera as a diet information tool? And when escorting patients to reception why not ask their permission to contact them by e-mail or send a friendly e-mail newsletter? Be a techie; embrace technology any way you can and show your patients you are part of a modern practice and most importantly, you care.

### Biography

Originally a graduate from the University of Toronto in Canada, Laurelyn has been working as a dental hygienist for general dentists and specialists for the past 35 years in various parts of the world. As Australian citizens, Laurelyn and her husband Patrick are now firmly established in Townsville, QLD where she is a clinician at SMILE Dental and also delivers workshops to dentists and hygienists to take the guesswork out of their working relationships. She is proud to be a hygienist and to work in a practice that values her knowledge as much as her skills. For information about her workshop "Develop the hygienist. Develop the practice." please contact Sarah Arnold at SMILE Dental (07) 4779 4533 or e-mail [sarah@smiledental.com.au](mailto:sarah@smiledental.com.au)

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