




Interview: What will the future of dentistry look like?

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In an upcoming virtual round-table discussion, three international dental professionals will outline some of their expectations regarding the future of dentistry. (Image: Marko Alaksandr/Shutterstock)




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By Brendan Day, Dental Tribune International
Tue, 4 January 2022

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For Dr Victoria Sampson, the connection between oral and systemic health is of central concern when dealing with her dental patients. She employs biomarkers and inflammatory markers to diagnose and monitor patients throughout the course of treatment and collaborates with specialists from other fields to create a more holistic form of treatment. At the upcoming GBT Summit—Virtual Edition, Dr Sampson will be participating in a round-table conversation with Dr Steffen Rieger and dental hygienist Thuy Vu on the future of dentistry. She spoke with Dental Tribune International about her approach to dentistry and how she sees the field evolving in the coming years.

Your approach to dentistry is preventative and minimally invasive in its nature. Do you regard these as areas that will become increasingly important for dental practitioners in the future?

Definitely. We are now living in a society where our patients have more knowledge of their own health and of what treatments are available. They want to have the most preventative and least invasive treatment possible to ensure optimal health.

As an industry, we have modernised in such a way that we are able to catch disease earlier and provide more minimally invasive treatments. We have all lived through a pandemic, which has taught us how important health is and reinforced the idea that prevention is always better than cure. I always try to teach my patients that oral health is a very important part of general health and that in order to be at optimal health, they must also take care of their mouths. We now know that poor oral health can contribute to numerous other systemic diseases and conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and infertility. Dental professionals are slowly starting to understand that the work they do has huge consequences for the rest of the body. It is our duty to arrest disease and prevent problems from happening.

What other aspects of dentistry do you think will change or evolve in the future?

I think that we are going to see a huge digitalisation of dentistry in the next ten years, similar to the rest of healthcare. Many dentists already follow a digital workflow to allow for seamless communication with laboratory technicians through intra oral scanning and CAD/CAM restorations. I think this is just the beginning. There is already so much research going into incorporating artificial intelligence and image recognition to help us diagnose and monitor dental and systemic diseases. I think this soon won't be a thing of the future, but very much something we use to help us every day.

I also think, and hope, that dental professionals will become more aware of how important saliva is and how much information it can give us not only of a patient's dental health but also of their systemic health. I envisage that patients will start going to their dentist for saliva tests in the same way that they go to their doctor now for blood tests. We are already quite used to using the mouth as a site for testing, thanks to COVID-19, and I think this will become more common in the dental practice. We are now starting to understand that saliva can give a snapshot of the oral microbiome, be used for genetic testing and indicate enzyme levels, collagen breakdown, inflammatory markers and even cancer markers. By diagnosing and monitoring dental diseases in a quantitative way, we will hopefully start to achieve better long-term outcomes for our patients. Unfortunately, we usually diagnose dental disease when it is too late and destruction has already occurred—be it periodontal disease or dental caries. If we were able to screen patients for early signs of inflammation, microbiome dysbiosis, high levels of certain enzyme activity or collagen breakdown, we would hopefully be able to prevent the disease from happening.

In your opinion, what can dental teams do to make sure they are prepared to adapt to changes in dentistry?

They need to be open to change. Dentistry can be extremely habitual and dental professionals often stick to what they are used to. When we have the health of our patients in our hands, it can be very daunting to try new things out, particularly when you think your own method already works. Whereas I don't think we should be experimenting on our patients, we should, however, be open to trying new things to enhance our patient's journeys and improve their treatment outcomes. For example, we use bleeding on probing as a diagnostic tool to diagnose inflammation of the gums. This can be subjective and also inconclusive. If we were able to quantitatively diagnose inflammation through looking at inflammatory markers or looking for pathogenic bacteria in the mouth, our patients' treatment outcomes would be improved since we would have a number to work with and a cause of the inflammation to eradicate. We aren't trying to reinvent the wheel, just make it better and more accurate!



Dr Victoria Sampson. (Image: Victoria Sampson)

“Dental professionals are slowly starting to understand that the work they do has huge consequences for the rest of the body”

I also strongly recommend that dental professionals update their knowledge through regular reading of research papers and attending conferences. Our industry can be quite lonely, and it is important to keep your finger on the pulse by staying updated.

What are you looking forward to most about this round-table discussion?

I am truly excited about having the opportunity to speak to like-minded professionals of such a high calibre on the future of dentistry. We are all practising dental professionals from different countries who will be able to share how we do things and what we expect the future to be like. We also all do very different things in practice but share a similar mindset. I am excited about being able to learn more about what they do and where they see dentistry going in the next five years. I usually lecture alone so I am also looking forward to having fun and interactive discussions!

Editorial note:
As part of the GBT Summit—Virtual Edition, which will be hosted by EMS and the Swiss Dental Academy and broadcast live starting on 8 January 2022 at 9:00 a.m. CET, Dr Sampson will be participating in a virtual round-table discussion titled “The future of dentistry”. The virtual round table will begin at 4:00 p.m. CET and participants will be able to earn a continuing education credit by answering a questionnaire after the discussion. Dental professionals who would like to attend the presentation may register on the [Swiss Dental Academy's website](#)

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 Dr. Phillip Y. Kang DDS

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Dr. Ashraf Fouad DDS, MS, Dr. Ira Lamster DDS, MMSc, Editor-in-Chief

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