Hello Bracket Table, Meet iPad

by Chelsea Patten, staff writer, *Dentaltown Magazine*

To make treatment plans easier for patients to understand, a dentist might sketch something on a scrap piece of paper, illustrating the procedure. Since dental school doesn't include an art class, Dr. Robert Marcus, a dentist in San Diego, California, had grown tired of his anemic bracket table doodles. His figures were not as illustrative as he wished, hindering his ability to explain technical concepts to patients in a visual and easy-to-understand way.

Enter Tracy Francis, an artist and patient of Marcus'. Knowing Francis' background in technical drawing – Francis designs and manufactures plastics, to be specific – Marcus approached him about creating better template drawings for his office. Francis agreed and after he presented Marcus with 10 templates of tooth drawings, Marcus took it one step further. Developer Jay Van Vark's children attended the same school as Marcus' children. Marcus knew of Van Vark's experience in developing iPad applications for the sports world, specifically for coaches. Marcus approached Van Vark with Francis' tooth

sketches and asked, "Can you make an app to show these pictures of teeth on my iPad?" That was December, 2009.

From there, DDS GP (or Dental Demo Suite General Practice) was born, cultivated by the trio in Marcus' living room. Since the three had no capital investment, they dove in together, agreeing they would split the profits if the idea took off.

And take off it did. DDS GP is currently the top grossing medical app in Apple's App Store. This easy application for the iPad has simplified and revolutionized chairside patient education. Like Marcus, it seems many dentists were wary of their bracket-table chicken scratches but just as disinterested in the non-interactive patient education videos.

"The purpose of our app is not to teach dentists what they ought to be doing. The purpose of our app is to teach patients," says Marcus. "If a dentist is learning from our app, there's a problem." Marcus wanted to be the one to talk to his patients. He didn't want someone doing it for him from a television screen. Also, the lack of control in typical patient educaiton

videos – like the inability to stop, rewind, resume and skip – is what motivated the stop-motion drawings of the app.

The app consists of approximately 200 dental concepts from abfraction to X-rays and is organized into a concise yet comprehensive side menu of topics. Tap one of these topics with your fingertip and multiple subcategories appear. This system continues until a final subtopic is selected and the series of photos flows through like an animated film. These individual frames allow the dentist to control the speed and stop on any frame throughout the demonstration.

Scheduled to launch at the California Dental Association (CDA) meeting in May 2010 in Anaheim, Marcus, Francis and Van Vark set the app's price-point low ($299) for show-goers, in order to gauge interest. The original price point was actually $800, which for an app seems quite high, but is not nearly as expensive as "usual" dental software. After the CDA show, the trio couldn't believe the interest. They decided to keep the price point low at the one-time fee of $399, meaning there are no subscriptions or update charges.

"We priced it to be fair," says Marcus. Other similar products on the market are expensive and require subscriptions or frequent updates for purchase – these include dental software specifically for patient education, books, brochures and posters. Currently there is no other dentist-owned company making a patient consult product.

DDS GP has already undergone several updates including the addition of various convenient features. Easy selection tools, the ability to draw on pictures and the ability to add your own photos have grown out of the ever-adapting app. The drawings have been re-touched, the processes have been streamlined, the most minor of wrinkles have been ironed out and they are still constantly making updates according to user suggestions.

The team has developed a second app called DDS GP Yes!, which was developed for dentists who need a bit more help explaining technical procedures to patients. Rather than just providing "bracket-table" type drawings, the app helps dentists with what to say by converting scientific jargon into layman terms. DDS Yes! is written and narrated by Paul Homoly, experienced clinician and founder of the Homoly Communications Institute.

And the team has yet another idea brewing and ready to hit the market this spring – an app for patients to request appointments – called DDS App. Any dental practice can, for a one-time fee of $899, have a custom app built for their office. Patients can then download this specific app to their smartphones and tablets, free of charge. The app includes four simple directives – contact information, a map, refer a friend and request an appointment; other optional features include: services offered, about the doctor, about the staff, and can include custom pages as well. The refer-a-friend feature is particularly useful since sometimes the process of making a referral is broken when the referrer doesn't have the information handy but intends to send it later, then forgets. Another option is the emergency feature where a patient can take a photo with the mobile device and send it to the doctor. The app would make the information available literally at the touch of a button with no need to remember a domain name.

Creating an app is possible through many companies, but is typically far more complicated and expensive. Also, rather than it being a portal to a mobile-enhanced Web site, the app stands alone; almost like an interactive business card for patients. It is available on iPhone, Android and Blackberry platforms, all at the set price. "Patients don't want fancy," Marcus explains. "They just want the information to be easy and accessible." With an app, information is exactly that.

For more information about DDS GP, DDS GP Yes!, visit: www.ddsgp.com, and for the custom app generator, visit www.ddsapp.com.

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