The Future of Dentistry

I was fortunate to be one of the 155,000 dental professionals from 157 countries who descended on Cologne, Germany, for International Dental Show 2017—the largest dental meeting on the planet. Try to imagine 2,305 exhibitors spread out through multiple buildings with a total exhibit space of 1.75 million square feet—the equivalent of 30 football fields! I managed to walk more than 45 miles covering the show.

The physical scale of this event speaks volumes to its importance in our profession. This is the perfect window into the present and future of dentistry around the world. This month I will address the major technology themes coming out of the show.

**Three-dimensional printers** made the biggest impact on my time at the show because they’ve exploded in number and capabilities. For many years, few 3-D printers in the market could print basic wax patterns, models or surgical guides. At this year’s show the printer vendors were extremely busy, and the displayed materials made it clear that we’d be printing long-term restorations and removable prostheses in the coming year. These solutions may not be commonplace out of the gate, but they imply a dental future where lab-fabricated items could be created on demand in your office.

The technology of now is **milling** and the options are too numerous to list; needless to say, a milling option exists for any size office or dental lab. It’s clear that milling will continue to dominate in the near future simply because any dental material can be milled, and the material’s consistency is unrivaled. The primary criticism of milling is the material waste. A crown manufactured through digital printing may only require 1/10 of the material that would be used milling a single block. The increased competition from the additional milling materials available may mitigate some of the cost differences associated with these two manufacturing methods. However, when it comes to surgical guides and models, I think printing is already the winner.

The single best option for replacing a missing tooth is an **implant**. Hundreds of companies now manufacture and sell these little marvels with an endless number of unique design features. Implants are not new technology in the vein of milling and printing; rather, they are approaching commodity status and will be forced to compete on the battleground of price. This may initially sound like good news, but the long-term concern will be the viability of these numerous companies. Many clinicians will learn the hard way that repairing an inexpensive implant is impossible when the company that made it has gone out of business. This is the other by-product of having so many companies in the same space—consolidation is inevitable.

The IDS always provides a broad view into the present and future of our profession, and the attendance this year suggests that we have a very bright future. If you have a dental bucket list, put this meeting at the top—next to Townie Meeting. Of course!

---

**Share your comments about this column online!**

To weigh in on Dr. Giacobbi’s column, go to dentaltown.com and click “Read Current Issue.” If you have a question, email him at tom@farranmedia.com or hit him up on Twitter: @ddsTom.

---

by Thomas Giacobbi, DDS, FAGD, editorial director, Dentaltown magazine