

Blending artistry and science in dentistry: A reflection on 2023

SADJ October 2023, Vol. 78 No.10 p485-486

Prof NH Wood - *BChD, DipOdont(MFP), MDent(OMP), FCD(SA), PhD*

As we approach the close of 2023, a year that is still testing the resilience of humanity globally, it is fitting to reflect on the path we've traversed in the realm of dentistry. Our profession, inherently entwined with the wellbeing of individuals, has weathered the storms of financial challenges, mental strain and physical hardships. Yet, in the face of adversity, the blend of artistry and science in dentistry stands as a beacon of unwavering commitment to the health and dignity of our patients and their communities.

The artistry of dentistry

Dentistry, often perceived as a clinical science, carries within it an undeniable artistry. The delicate craftsmanship required in restorative procedures, the finesse in cosmetic dentistry and the nuanced skill in creating prosthodontic masterpieces are all expressions of the artistic dimension of our profession. As clinicians, we are akin to sculptors shaping smiles, and our canvases are the oral landscapes of our patients.

In the intricate dance between the handpiece and the canvas of a patient's tooth, the fusion of artistic tendencies and clinical acumen is where the true magic of dentistry unfolds. Beyond the precision demanded by scientific protocols, it is the artistic sensibilities of

a dentist that breathe life into every restoration and rehabilitation. Artistic prowess in dentistry is not merely about aesthetics; it is about understanding the subtleties of shape, proportion, function and colour that define a natural smile. From crafting lifelike restorations to harmonising the contours of orthodontic treatments, the artist in a dentist brings forth a dimension that transcends the clinical, elevating the patient experience from a procedure to a form of aesthetic enhancement. The ability to visualise the result, to sculpt with finesse and to appreciate the nuances of individuality in each patient's anatomy underscores the necessity of artistic tendencies in clinical dental practice. It is this artistic touch that transforms a dental intervention from a technical procedure into a personalised masterpiece, leaving an indelible mark on the canvas of a patient's smile.

This year, the South African Dental Journal has had the privilege of showcasing the artistry of our colleagues through a myriad case studies, research articles and reviews. The meticulous detailing of treatment plans, the innovative use of materials and the artistic finesse demonstrated by our contributors illuminate the aesthetic facet of our profession. This intersection of art and science not only advances our understanding but also enriches the tapestry of our collective knowledge.



Navigating the interference: Science under siege

Even as we celebrate the artistry within our profession, we must acknowledge the challenges posed by external interference. The encroachment of non-scientific influences, often driven by personal pursuits, commercial interests or unfounded beliefs, threatens the core principles of evidence-based dentistry. In an era where misinformation spreads as swiftly as legitimate knowledge, or even when fear of reprisal dictates actions, our commitment to the scientific foundations of our practice is more crucial than ever.

Throughout this year, social media presented us with debates on the efficacy of established treatment modalities, the promotion of dubious remedies and the commodification of dental care. This possibly made patient interactions slightly more challenging for some practices, while others could utilise this to their advantage. As one of the custodians of academic integrity, the South African Dental Journal has stood firm in presenting peer-reviewed, evidence-based perspectives to our readers. We have dissected controversies, critiqued questionable practices and reaffirmed the unwavering importance of scientific rigour in our profession.

The harmony of art and science

In navigating the delicate balance between artistry and science, we find the true essence of our profession. The discerning eye of an artist combined with the rigorous mind of a scientist allows us to deliver not just treatments, but transformative experiences for our patients. It is in this synergy that dentistry becomes a vocation, a calling to meld the precision of science with the compassion and creativity of art.

Dentistry, in its essence, stands as a unique amalgamation of art and science. Unlike many other medical disciplines, dentistry demands a level of precision akin to that of a sculptor while navigating the intricate landscape of oral anatomy. The uniqueness of the oral cavity, with its delicate balance of function, aesthetics and structural integrity, requires a practitioner to seamlessly blend the analytical mindset of a scientist with the artistic intuition of an artisan. This fusion is not just a professional choice but a necessity, as every clinical decision reverberates beyond the immediate procedural context. Successful patient outcomes in dental practice are not solely measured by the absence of pathology; they are defined by the restoration of function, the enhancement of aesthetics and the preservation of the patient's overall wellbeing.

The dentist, as both scientist and artist, becomes an orchestrator, ensuring that each intervention harmonises with the broader composition of the patient's oral health. We do not simply recognise abnormalities and treat those. Rather, it is in the synthesis of art and science that dentistry finds its uniqueness, and it is through this harmonious blend that practitioners achieve outcomes that transcend the utilitarian and delve into the realm of transformative care. I have personally interacted with a number of practitioners who proudly recognise they add their own personal touch to a restoration, a graft or a rehabilitation, as if a clinical signature for peers to recognise.

A grateful acknowledgment

As we approach the conclusion of this tumultuous year, the South African Dental Association and the editorial and publishing staff of the South African Dental Journal extend heartfelt gratitude. Our sincerest thanks go to the authors and contributors whose dedication to scholarly excellence has enriched our pages. To the diligent reviewers who have lent their expertise to ensure the quality of our content, we express our deepest appreciation.

Congratulations are due to those whose work has been recognised, commended and cited. Your contributions, whether in elucidating novel research findings or sharing invaluable clinical experiences, have not only advanced our understanding but have also inspired the next generation of dental professionals.

The South African Dental Journal has been honoured to be a platform for disseminating these advancements, and for fostering a community dedicated to pushing the boundaries of our knowledge.

A call to unity

Let us reaffirm our commitment to unity within our profession. In the face of external challenges, our solidarity becomes our greatest strength. Let the artistry of our craft and the precision of our science be the guiding lights that lead us through the uncertainties that lie ahead.

As we step into a new year, we will carry forward the lessons learned and look to find further advancements. The canvas of dentistry awaits our strokes and, with the blend of artistry and science, we shall continue to shape smiles, restore health and contribute to the collective wellbeing of our communities. We wish you a peaceful and prosperous festive season.

