

Author:

- In Figures 1, 3, 6, 7, and 8 the names of the patient and/or receiving dentist are clearly written in the screen capture. For privacy purposes, do you want either to block out the names or put in names that are clearly fictional?
- What is "DXR"? It is used throughout the article... please define on first reference.

Digital X-Ray File Sharing Redefines the "Solo" Practitioner



Kenneth S. Magid, DDS

Historically, the great majority of dentists have been "solo" practitioners with limited access to immediate inter-dentist communication. The digital age has brought about a new ability for dentists to share patient clinical information, including radiographs and intraoral photographs, to provide a higher level of patient service. It isn't necessary for the dentists involved in the communication to have the same digital x-ray software, since most current programs can export radiographs in a variety of formats that are mutually readable. It isn't even necessary for the receiving dentist to have any digital radiography hardware or software at all. Radiographs can be sent in a standard "image" format, readable by any computer.

Callout here

GENERAL DENTIST-TO-SPECIALIST COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the most significant benefit of this is found in the flow of information between the general dentist and the various specialists. [Author: is above sentence correct as edited?] For example, an endodontic consultation can now consist of the general dentist exporting digital radiographs of the suspect tooth highlighted by the area of concern, along with an intraoral photograph showing any cracks in the tooth structure (Figure 1). If the results of clinical tests and findings are included, this communication is very close to having the specialist in the office. This vital information can be sent to the endodontist before the patient even leaves the general dentist's office. In offices that have part-time specialists, the ability of the specialist to digitally review x-rays and intraoral photographs remotely ameliorates many of the difficulties that occur when the specialist is not

available "in person."

Since with digital communication there is no difference between next-door and next-state, a consultation with an expert has its broadest interpretation. The availability of digital panoramic radiographs expands the parameters of digital communication. With one of my patients in New York, a consultation on a questionable radiopacity with Robert Strauss, MD, DDS, at Medical College of Virginia resulted in a diagnosis of florid osseous dysplasia that prevented a problematic implant surgery.

Often, the general dentist "shares" the ongoing treatment of a patient with a periodontist. The ability to export a full series of radiographs provides both treating dentists with current diagnostic information. Although double-pack film can be used or duplicate films created, digital radiography permits exporting and importing without the difficulty, effort, or degradation inherent in these alternatives. With 2 or 3 clicks of the mouse, the full series is imported or exported, to be viewed within minutes.

TWO (OR MORE) HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

The availability of digital radiographs and photographs permits solo practitioners to avail themselves easily of the wisdom of the group. E-mail networks such as Crown Council, EliteDOCS, or Dentaltown permit sharing diagnostic information with numerous colleagues at once. When this is done the extended "strings" of conversation often result in treatment choices that the solo practitioner had not considered. [Author: is above sentence correct as edited?] It is only with the ability for everyone to see the radiographs and photographs that informed choices can be discussed and the patient provided with the best and most complete treatment options.

One tremendous advantage of digital media that doesn't actually involve "exporting or importing" is dentists' ability to view their patients' radiographs and photographs from anywhere in the world where there is a computer with Internet access. When a patient calls with an emergency problem after-hours, the dentist can use an inexpensive Internet resource such as "Go to My PC" (gotomypc.com) to review all the patient's radiographs and

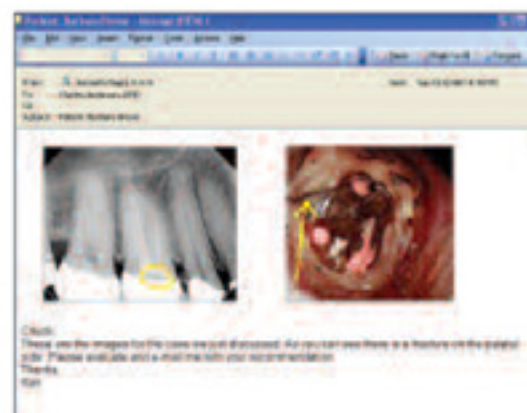


Figure 1. Save time and effort with e-shared x-ray and photographic images as well as clinical notes.



Figure 2. Use your digital imaging system's e-mail feature to send images to colleagues quickly and efficiently.



Figure 3. Messages generated from your digital imaging system messages work with your existing e-mail program. [Author: Is this legend correct? Please review.]

continued on page 49

of the information to be sent, and then to formulate a plan to minimize those risks. In fact, the HIPPA Security rule gives total flexibility to providers to create their own privacy procedures, tailored to fit their size and needs.

For the e-mailing of images, this can mean something as simple as a password-protected e-mail account or computer station that is used to receive e-mail messages with images as attachments. In addition, you as a sending party can set passwords with recipients so that only those with these passwords can open the messages and documents. A variety of technical expertise is available to help you set the standards you feel are appropriate for your particular practice. One source of information is the American Dental Association (ada.org).

CONCLUSION

With all of these technological breakthroughs at our disposal, there is no reason to let computer viruses or HIPAA discourage your e-efforts. Create a process that meets guidelines and move forward. Sending images electronically is just one of the gifts we've come to expect from the digital age. ♦

Dr. Magid lectures throughout Canada and the United States and is a contributor to many journals and newsletters on topics such as minimally invasive dentistry, lasers, and cosmetic procedures and techniques, as well as high-tech dentistry. He is director of pre-doctoral laser dentistry and associate clinical professor of honors and international esthetics at New York University College of Dentistry. Dr. Magid has also appeared on nationwide television and radio programs to discuss high-tech and cosmetic dentistry. He has helped develop and patented many widely used devices in dentistry. He maintains a private practice in general dentistry with an emphasis on high technology and cosmetics in Westchester, NY. He can be reached at ken.magid@gmail.com.