

DENTISTRY: 24 TRENDS FOR 24

“The best way to predict the future is to create it” *Peter Drucker*



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Throughout 2023, I had the opportunity to follow and complete a series of postgraduate courses in management, regulation, bioethics and defence/cybersecurity. At the same time, as part of my consultancy activities, I regularly take part in a series of webinars on wide-ranging topics with leading figures from all areas of knowledge, from companies, universities, the environment, digital, public health, regulation, security and defense, the independent practice of professions, among others.

Having not practiced clinically for some years now, I nevertheless feel even more like a dentist, more capable of writing this chronicle in which I will try to symbolically identify 24 trends that I believe will be decisive for global dentistry in 2024. In the collaboration that I have renewed with O'JornalDentistry over the course of this year, I will develop some of these trends in a monthly chronicle, with an approach in which I will try to bring a different angle to all those who are interested in following the health sector and dentistry. As usual, these chronicles will be written in Portuguese and translated into English. A greeting and thanks to the publisher Hermínia Guimarães and to the readers who receive them or look for them all over the world and who have encouraged us to renew this project where I collaborate *pro bono*.

These trends have been grouped in alphabetical order, due to my personal inability to organise them in any other way.

So...

Accentuation of the feminization of the health professions: in some parts of the world this feminization reaches more than 80% in universities. There is a need to review university access mechanisms in the field of health and to promote greater gender diversity.

Extension of Dental Medicine: through the acquisition of skills to enable dentists to provide non-traditional procedures such as Orofacial Harmonization, namely with botulism toxin and hyaluronic acid, Acupuncture, Ozone Therapy, Dental Sleep Medicine, Forensic Dentistry and Minimal Inhalation Sedation with Nitrogen Protioxide and Oxygen, Orofacial Pain and Dysfunction, among others.

Chatbots for dialogue with clinics and practices: explosion of digital applications in contact processes with organi-

zations, in customer service, in literacy, in booking appointments in a personalized and targeted way. Total or partial replacement by this type of digital tool of receptionists in organizations due to rising labour costs.

Dental clinics as points of sale: to make it easier for patients, there will be an increase in the availability and sale of devices and some medicines adapted to professional prescription in dental clinics and practices: brushes, toothbrushes, various devices, among others. Development of ethical standards for this new trend. Regulators will have to take the lead.

Home care: demographics, the difficulty of providing oral health care in more remote areas where there is no critical mass of consumers will stimulate the home care market. Residential care facilities for the elderly are a very attractive target, given the possibility of expanding the number of patients and interventions with less travelling.

Curriculum: beginning of curriculum review processes with the incorporation of AI, personalized teaching and immersive learning. Increasing shift from the paradigm of memorization to critical thinking, problem-solving and clinical and emotional intelligence. Greater emphasis on updating lifelong learning in educational institutions.

Demographics: the ageing of the population, which is occurring above all in Europe, but also in the USA and even China, albeit on a smaller scale, will continue to cause dentistry to pay special attention in 2024 to certain specificities when dealing with ageing populations, particularly in terms of periodontics and aesthetic rehabilitation and masticatory function.

Professional diversification: there is a worldwide trend, which will become more pronounced in 2024, to be in the health professions in addition to other activities. This is to be welcomed. In 2024, we will see an increased tendency for oral health professionals to mitigate their clinical practice with other professional activities, both inside and outside of dentistry. Burnout has a dramatic impact on all health professions and this diversification is also a way of helping to prevent it.

Dental education: the reduced interest in the health professions among young people in more developed countries (i.e. economically, of course) will also lead universities to recruit students from third countries.

Oral health teams: more multicultural diversification, more interprofessional collaboration with other health professions, more competence in digital and marketing skills to attract leads.

Outsourcing of diagnostic aids: imaging will be a growing area of outsourcing, whether it's carrying out more sophisticated radiological exams, printing devices or reading these exams: oral health professionals will have to be at the center of prescribing, remote monitoring, and the final diagnostic decision. The possible emergence of an organizational offer geared exclusively towards providing this type of service.

Financing: greater introduction of financing and payment models for procedures based on individual and collective risk, on results and on the evaluation of service recipients. Loss of preponderance of the direct payment model, fee-for-service.

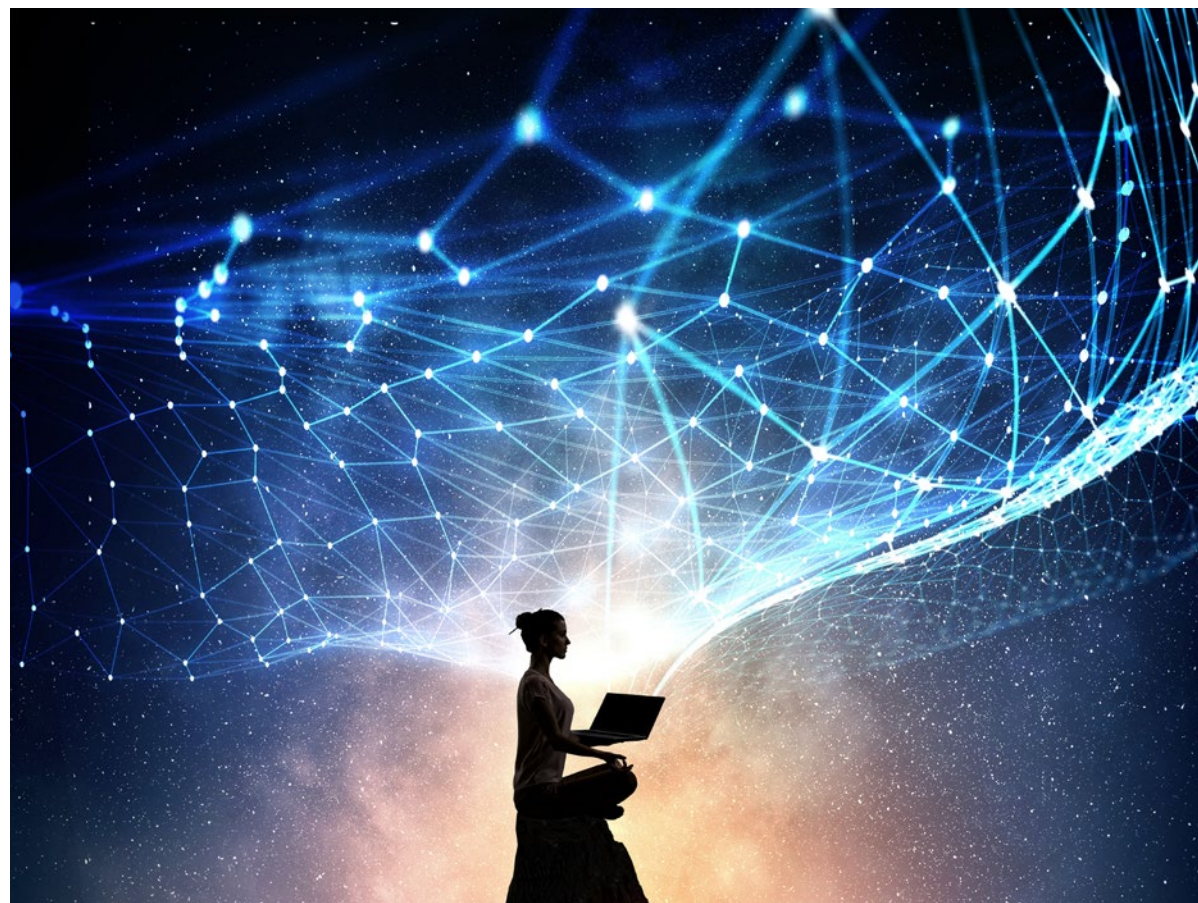
Continuing training: the mapping by professional organizations, registration and certification of continuing training will increase in 2024. The consumer will be very attentive to sectoral competences, specializations and training paths lived and experienced with an impact on clinical practice.

Artificial intelligence: a sharp increase in all healthcare applications and platforms, with technological developments in the field of data analysis and robotics that will greatly change the device and equipment industry. Patients will allow and even demand more sharing of clinical information.

Interoperability of health records: consumers will demand that their health record be integrated at the click of a button or through digital interaction. Organizations and providers, insurances and systems will have to increase levels of compatibility between systems accordingly. The need for greater investment in cybersecurity and data protection by organizations.

M&A of organizations: concentration of clinical space through M&A, mergers and acquisitions of clinics and networks of establishments. Dentists emphasize a lack of interest in the ownership of organizations, in long-term commitment, to the detriment of professional mobility and agility.

Mobility of health professionals: the World Health Organization predicts a need for around 18 million health professionals by 2030, particularly affecting low and mid-



dle-income countries per capita. This trend is accentuated at global level for dentists and oral hygienists, although in the case of dentistry, which is highly dependent on direct private payments, there are sometimes situations of excess professionals due to their concentration in more densely populated and higher-income areas.

Norms and Guidelines: the profession generally needs to deepen its recommendations, norms, and clinical and quality standards. One example is the discussion taking place in some places about the need to review the empirical concept of recalling patients every 6 months. The issues of bioethics, end of life, long-term and palliative care, gender, and identification will take center stage in healthcare in 2024.

Prices and costs: inflation, which for various reasons has affected a huge range of goods and services, will continue to be felt in 2024. Dentists' fees will rise, in line with those of other health professionals, and the prices of materials, equipment and oral health team members in general will also rise. As a result, healthcare costs for consumers will also continue to rise. There will also be a trend towards greater transparency and easier to understand fee scales and associated procedures. Implementation of simplified coding mechanisms that can be monitored by stakeholders, insurers, providers, and patients.

Prevention with Precision: identifying risk factors to provide more personalized and efficient care. Examples: oral health consultation for diabetics. Prevention of sleep apnea in dentistry.

Reconversion of healthcare professionals: reskilling and task sharing as a response to the growing demand for healthcare with global specificities will stimulate the traditional configuration of professional profiles in the healthcare area. For example, diabetic and hypertensive control and vaccination in pharmacies and dental clinics.

Yesterday's soft skills are today's hard skills: the skills of communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, empathy, conflict resolution, adaptability and flexibility will become even more fundamental, along with the technical skills of professionals.

Dental tourism: in this post-pandemic period that we are still experiencing, there is a noticeable trend towards hybridization of the dental telemedicine model, particularly in terms of pre-treatment and follow-up, which will contribute to the increase in this form of oral health care.

Value Based Health Care: the customer will increasingly be at the center of organizations' attention. As such, the entire journey through a healthcare organization, practice, clinic or hospital is an integral part of that experience: from searching for a provider on the internet, contacting them by phone or booking an appointment online, waiting times, clinical procedures, service, comfort and follow-up.

An excellent 2024 for a unique profession: dentistry. The one that combines the intellectual conception of a work with the medical, operative and surgical execution of it, through appropriate procedures carried out on the patient. ■