



Appreciating value

Michael Sultan asks how much a good dentist is really worth.

Dentistry has changed an awful lot in the last few years, and not least in the way we market our services to the

general public. Most dental practices now have their own website, and many will also have social media pages where team members can interact with patients in ways like never before. But while the internet has clearly had many positive repercussions in the way we market our practices, it has also had a number of important consequences as well. This includes a shift in the way the public perceive our profession, and the value the public place in the services we have to offer.

Commoditisation culture

Anyone who is anyone these days will know that the internet is teeming

with online retailers all trying to 'out do' each other to offer the most choice and the best value possible. The success of Amazon and the slow demise of the high street bookstore is but one example of how online retailers are fast becoming the go-to place for the best offers and the cheapest products.

But it doesn't just stop with online stores. The internet is now *the* place to find the lowest prices for just about anything at all. Even insurance is a massive area of competition on the internet now, and I am sure colleagues will be familiar with the advertising campaigns that have been run by the likes of Compare the

Market, Go Compare and Confused.

While of course there is nothing wrong with people trying to save money where they can, the problem arises when you consider the impact that this price-driven buying culture is having on dentistry. Quite simply our profession, and the services that we offer are becoming commoditised, and our patients are being encouraged to mistake price with value and quality.

Value

If any proof was needed of the 'commoditisation' of dentistry, I recently stumbled upon a newly launched website: **CompareMySmile.com**. As you may expect, the site allows members of the public to compare price estimates for dental treatment in locations across the UK. So, Joe Public can log on, type 'veneers in London' and they will then receive a list of quotes from registered practices in the area.

To most dentists, the problems with this type of website would seem clear. On one level, it pampers to the misconception that good dentistry is just a numbers game. If I can do a root canal treatment for £X and you can do a root canal for £200 less, then clearly the patient will opt to have the treatment with you and not me. After all, your treatment is cheaper, so if the product is identical then one is better value. The worrying thing here is that many patients really do believe this to be the case. They don't appreciate the value to be found in good dental treatment; nor do they understand the simple fact that not all dentists are the same, and not all dentists can provide the same standard of care.

As you would expect, the comparison site makes no attempt to dispel this myth. However it does go to great lengths to assure patients that the treatment they will receive will be of the highest quality. On the 'our dentists' page it clearly states that all its members must meet 'strict criteria to ensure that only the UK's most reputable practices become part of the CompareMySmile.com family'. These criteria require that dentists:

- 1) Are registered with the General Dental Council,
- 2) Have completed one year's accredited private or hospital based training, and
- 3) Have completed at least 75 hours of verifiable CPD in the last five years.

I think these strict criteria speak for themselves.

As a profession, clearly we still have an awful lot more work to do. While comparison websites and the likes of GroupOn encourage patients to look at our work in purely financial terms, our efforts should be directed to showing patients what real value in dentistry is – that teeth are just too valuable to be treated as something that can be bought and sold. Good dentistry is and always will be about forming strong professional relationships with our patients, understanding their needs and providing the very best standard of care possible. We are, at our heart, a caring profession, and if we let price become the determining factor in what we do, then that relationship will slowly start to fade.



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Reference 1: GSK Data on File, MMR Research, 2013.

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