The internet: education, social media and dental practice

ANGUS BURNS and SIMON WOLSTENCROFT offer advice to dentists about various uses of the internet, including accessing dental literature, keeping informed about events for dental professionals, and communicating with patients.

Introduction

The rapid growth of the internet for business and personal use has been witnessed over the past decade and in 2010 it was estimated that approximately two billion people worldwide have access to the internet, representing about 29% of the world’s population. This article explores the implications of the internet for the practice of dentistry in Ireland. Areas of interest include the use of electronic media for education and continuing professional development (CPD), the quality of information available to patients online, advertising on the web, and the use of social networking as a means of practice building and oral health promotion.

Education

The internet has allowed dental journals and educational resources to be published online – some subscription based and some free to the user. The major advantage of this is the ability to access articles of interest remotely, i.e., from home or the dental practice, via your own computer and internet connection, rather than visiting a library to access paper journals. It also facilitates journal searches and reduces the burden of journal storage. The internet opens up access to a greater variety of journals outside of a traditional collection and the ability to search for articles electronically through a journal’s own web page or through a suitable scientific search engine is invaluable if you are researching a particular subject. Examples of popular search engines included PubMed, Scopus and Google Scholar (Table 1). It has never been easier to locate an article of interest from a vast database, view the material and be directed to similar articles. The results may show a consensus on a particular issue, or may alert the reader to the fact that controversy exists with regard to a new concept, new methods of treatment or new materials. In the era of evidenced-based treatment, these resources are invaluable.

As mentioned earlier, this information is not always free. Most journals have electronic subscriptions and if an article is to be purchased as a ‘once off’, it can be expensive. Undergraduate and postgraduate students can access a wide variety of material through university subscriptions, and many journals allow material to be viewed for free through their publishers online. These include the Journal of Dental Research, Angle Orthodontist and the Cochrane Database. Some restrictions can apply, such as only publishing back issues that are more than one year old (as in the case of the Journal of Dental Research). For journals that do not have free access, it is generally possible to access the abstract of any recent article for free through the above search engines.

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Currently, the Irish Faculty of Primary Dental Care, The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the HSE provide access to online resources (otherwise requiring subscription) to their employees, members and fellows via an ‘Athens’ online database. This is an economical way for the practising dentist to access a broad range of online journal articles and an increasing number of healthcare organisations now offer this service (Tables 2 and 3).

Articles are generally downloaded in portable document format (PDF). Once downloaded, these electronic files can be saved in the standard fashion to your computer to allow quick access in the future. If you are downloading large numbers of articles, there is software available to manage your own ‘library’. For Mac users, ‘Papers’ is a very handy software package, which allows you to sort your downloaded articles not unlike the way music files can be organised on Apple iTunes. A particularly helpful tool to catalogue article details for the purposes of referencing is ‘EndNote’. This software is invaluable for anybody engaged in scientific writing at any level, as it takes the nuisance and tedium out of arranging a bibliography and also allows the user to ‘cite’ an article in their library quickly. EndNote is designed to work in tandem with Microsoft Word.

**Continuing professional development**

Since the disbandment of the Post Graduate Medical and Dental Board, the responsibility for overseeing CPD in dentistry in Ireland lies with the Dental Council. It was the hope and intention of the last Council to introduce mandatory CPD for practising dentists. Dentists would be obliged to complete a set number of verifiable and non-verifiable hours of education during a five-year period. This will not now become mandatory until the passing of the next Dentist Act by the Government. It is likely that in the future a certain amount of the hours could be accounted for by completing online courses or even simply having certain subscriptions. A similar system is currently operated by the General Dental Council in the UK. The advantage of having CPD material available to complete online is of course the flexibility; practitioners can learn in their own time and are not restricted to set conferences and talks.

More casual online learning and discussion forums can be found at the Dental Town website. This large site includes a great deal of information (mostly provided by general dentists in the US) about everything and anything in dentistry. Online video presentations provide demonstrations of clinical procedures. There is the option to take online courses, which are recognised for part fulfilment of US CPD requirements. Membership is free and a browse of the site is recommended, but it should be noted that most of the information appears to be in the form of clinical opinion rather than evidence-based data, and caution is required!

**Journal/study clubs, data sharing and ‘cloud computing’**

Many postgraduate students operate journal clubs to ensure that they are fully updated on relevant subject matter. Many students supply abstracts and critiques to each other for group discussion. This has traditionally been done in a paper format but more recently is being done online in virtual learning spaces made easily accessible through ‘cloud computing’. The form of cloud computing most familiar to people is web-based email (e.g., Gmail, Hotmail, etc.). In a nutshell, cloud computing allows users to access a common data storage site from any computer with an internet connection. The journal/study club buys storage space online and can access their personal cloud space via a password (additional privacy settings are often available to make the site secure) to share documents and presentations.

The potential of the internet for dental education is vast, and there is also great potential for communication within a dental team. Clinical records can be gathered by one clinician for a case that requires multidisciplinary treatment, so that all the clinicians potentially involved can access the material and give their input towards the treatment plan and its completion. In addition to multi-site access, cloud computing offers security against loss of information by equipment theft or damage to clinic facilities. The additional cost of cloud facilities can be weighed against the reduced need for processing power and memory of the computers being used to view the information along with potentially less back-up cost.

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product but will shortly be replaced and upgraded with their latest cloud computing product iCloud, which offers a free expanded service to users. The are many companies now offering cloud computing sites and the cost is dependent on the size of the storage capacity, but costs are likely to fall as more competition enters the global market. Companies also provide cloud facilities specifically for the purpose of keeping medical and dental records with the ability to view digital radiographs through interfaces such as “Cloud-based PACS” (EBM technologies).

Dental associations and professional bodies
Websites are a means of keeping members informed of developments within the association or society, and in the profession as a whole. They can also act as a source of reliable information for the public. The Irish Dental Association’s website includes a wide range of information. There is a classified section for the profession, and a general section on dentistry for the public. The ‘find a dentist’ section is a means for the public to locate a local dentist easily; this section provides contact details for the IDA member’s practice, and a link to the practice website, should one exist. Smaller societies such as the Orthodontic Society of Ireland have similar information related to orthodontics on their websites (Table 4).

Information for patients online
Our patients can research dentistry like never before, and there is now a wealth of information available to anyone who takes an interest. However, there are concerns regarding the quality of the information available to the public. The internet is an open platform and anyone can post information, which is often not subject to peer review. Dentists and healthcare providers need to be aware of this problem and to educate patients accordingly, especially where misplaced expectations of patient care have been developed by online research. Research examining the quality of patient information about common procedures such as tonsillectomies and orthodontic extractions both found information to be very varied. It was also noted that the most popular sites were not usually the most accurate sources of information. It is a very worthwhile exercise to carry out online searches of common dental issues and see what kind of information is available to patients. Advertising and business interests clearly have a huge effect on the order in which information is available via search engines. It would seem logical for the medical and dental professions to be proactive in directing patients to good sources of online information. This is merely a natural evolution of the patient information leaflet concept to reinforce patient education and awareness.

Social media
The past decade has seen an explosion in the amount of social networking activity. By far the biggest worldwide social networking sites are Facebook and Twitter, but YouTube is becoming a powerful site where the public can view videos on a huge range of subjects.

Facebook
Facebook has 600 million users worldwide and had approximately 1.6 million active users in Ireland by last year. The site allows users to easily build a personal web page, to display photos and share their thoughts (blogging), and to send messages to other users. It also allows users to set up and join interest groups for just about anything. Businesses can take advantage of the service by setting up their own Facebook page to communicate with clients and potential clients. Users are encouraged to become ‘friends’ of the business and are encouraged to select the ‘like’ button to endorse the content of the site and, by implication, the business. This allows the business to both keep their customers updated with current news, developments and sales offers, and also to reach anyone who happens to look at the customer profile page. In essence it’s a ‘virtual’ word of mouth and allows you to reach a wide audience for free. Facebook makes a profit from the online advertising space it sells on the pages. This advertising is cleverly tailored to the individual by using information gathered from their profile. Advertisers select the location, age group and interests of their target audience. Many dental practices and companies are starting to use Facebook as an adjunct to their website, and dental advertisements can be targeted at a particular demographic of potential patients.

Twitter
Twitter is a short messaging and micro blogging service, which companies, celebrities and individuals can use to keep customers or ‘followers’ informed of developments. Its operation is ideal for the smartphone market as followers can be reached instantly. Facebook can also be accessed via smartphone, but was originally designed for computers. Again, Twitter can be used by dental practices to spread information quickly to their patients, assuming the patients subscribe to be ‘followers’ of the practice.

YouTube
YouTube is a video blogging site that allows individuals and companies to post videos onto the internet. There is a huge amount of content on YouTube, from instructions and demonstrations on how to assemble flat-packed furniture, to comedians hoping to find new audiences. From a dental perspective, our patients are now sharing their experiences of treatment online via video. YouTube allows easy uploading of videos and many video editing software packages also allow direct upload to YouTube to make the process even easier. Dental practices are now making use of YouTube and adding video content to their websites. See www.hiddenbraces.co.uk for an example of this powerful communication tool.

LinkedIn
LinkedIn is a professional social networking site, which allows businesses and business people to set up connections. The idea is the same as the traditional concept of developing business networks but in an online environment, and allows for a wider network to be reached.

Concerns about social media
A number of concerns have arisen about social media. Facebook has been under scrutiny over the sale of users’ data to companies who harvest information and sell it on to marketing firms. People
who provide information on Facebook may be unaware of this, and may feel that information has been used without their consent. This has the potential to be a legal problem for many online companies who hold personal information and use it incorrectly. Sites such as Facebook are constantly reviewing their privacy policies to try and limit these potential problems, but users need to be vigilant about the information they provide to online sites. Potential data protection and privacy issues can arise for individual business users of Facebook and similar sites. In dentistry, pages are open for all to see and practices may post pictures of patients who have undergone treatments, typically before and after photos. It is imperative to seek written and verbal consent from patients who agree to pictures or testimonials being posted to avoid any data protection problems (see below).

Another area requiring caution is the potential for negative or malicious comments to be posted on your business Facebook page. Close monitoring of a business Facebook page is a must to ensure that such material is removed and a malicious user ‘blocked’. Links in the form of ‘friends’ to other pages, such as dental supply companies, could contravene the code of practice of the Dental Council (see below) and practitioners would need to be able to stand over information contained on these pages if it was being used to help promote the practice.

Data protection
Any information held about a patient in an electronic format (or in any other format) in a practice is subject to current data protection legislation. The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner is the body in Ireland responsible for overseeing compliance with legislation. Up-to-date information regarding individual and organisational responsibilities in regard to data protection, and also individuals’ rights regarding their personal information held by others, is available online.

One key issue to stress is the need to register with the Data Protection Commissioner. Current legislation states that health professionals processing personal data related to mental or physical health need to register. Dentists running a practice fall into this category. The Commissioner’s website is www.dataprotection.ie.

Advertising online
Since the Dental Council issued new guidelines on public relations, communication of “appropriate professional information to the public” is allowed as long as it complies with these guidelines. Information about services must be “truthful, legal, decent, factual, relevant, accurate” and “must not have the potential to mislead the public”. As regards practice websites, they can include similar information to a practice brochure. Social media sites are not referred to in the code; however, it is stated that “dentists should avoid personal publicity, whether in press, radio, television or other media, where such publicity could result in his/her gaining professional advantage”. The word “advertising” appears nowhere in the code.

In order to clarify this issue, the Dental Council issued a further statement in September 2010 detailing more precisely what is and is not permitted. “Advertisement” as a word appears and it is stated clearly that practitioners should behave responsibly to ensure that information in adverts abides by the code of practice. The statement gives a list of details, that “a dental web presence must” display. These include the practice name, address, contact details, opening hours, name and qualification (including country) of the principal dentist and the date the website was last updated. Subjective practice and professional titles are not allowed and specific instructions on the use of clinical photographs and patient testimonials are given. What is also of note is that the dentist must ensure that information contained in web links complies with the code of practice if the information is designed to assist in promotion of the practice. A link to the Dental Council website is advised.

References

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Classified advert procedure

Please read these instructions prior to sending an advertisement. Below are the charges for placing an advertisement for both members and non-members. Advertisements will only be accepted in writing via fax, letter or email (fionnuala@irishdentalassoc.ie). Non-members must pre-pay for advertisements, which must arrive no later than November 4, 2011, by cheque made payable to the Irish Dental Association. If a box number is required, please indicate this at the end of the ad (replies to box number X). Classified ads placed in the Journal are also published on our website www.dentist.ie for 12 weeks.

Advert size Members Non-members
up to 25 words €75 €150
26 to 40 words €90 €180

Non-members must send in a cheque in advance with their advert. The maximum number of words for classified ads is 40.

Only if the advert is in excess of 40 words, then please contact:
Think Media
The Malthouse, 537 North Circular Road, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-856 1166 Fax: 01-856 1169 Email: paul@thinkmedia.ie

Please note that all classified adverts MUST come under one of the following headings:
Positions Wanted
Position Vacant
Practices for Sale/To Let
Practices Wanted
Unwanted/Second Hand Equipment for Sale

Classified adverts must not be of a commercial nature. All commercial adverts must be display advertisements, and these can be arranged by contacting Paul O’Grady at Think Media, Tel: 01 856 1166.

POSITIONS WANTED
Experienced dentist looking to relocate to Southeast of Ireland. Would like position as associate in Waterford, Tipperary, Kilkenny, or Carlow region. Please Email: daltd7@gmail.com.

Experienced dentist, highly qualified, looking for work on a daily or sessional basis, Dublin area. Available immediately. Email: jfob19@hotmail.com.

Competent, friendly dentist available. Looking for part-time or locum work in Cork area. Experienced in private practice and HSE. Flexible regarding evenings/Saturdays. Tel: 086-821 1212.

Female dentist with over 20 years’ experience in private practice seeks associate/locum position in Cork area. Any number of sessions considered. Available for immediate start. Tel: 087-943 5914.

POSITIONS VACANT
Associate required, Limerick City. Single chair practice with digital x-ray. Excellent opportunity. Minimum three years’ experience. Email: catherine.ann.burke@gmail.com.

Experienced part-time (three days) associate required for a busy practice in Co. Cavan (one hour from Dublin). Fully computerised, digital OPG, hygiene, intra-oral camera. Start November. Tel: 087-744 0398, or Email: info@virginadentalsurgery.com.

Experienced dental associate required for busy, modern dental practice in Galway City. Full book. Excellent staff. Superbly equipped and computerised (digital x-ray, OPG, hygiene, etc.). Email: info@redmondmolloy.ie.

Limerick: Experienced – minimum three to five years – ambitious, dynamic associate required for high profile modern clinic. Very busy, fully private. Computerised OPG, digitalised. Top of the range equipment, superbly trained staff. Extremely good long-term prospects. Email: info@crescentdental.ie.

Associate required in modern dental practice, Monaghan town. Fully computerised, digital x-ray. Please Email CV to: eldibany113@hotmail.com.

Associate dentist wanted for Wednesdays and Thursdays for busy practice. Tel: 042-933 7033.

Associate dentist required for modern, computerised South Dublin City Centre practice. Full clinical freedom. Excellent support team. Experience essential. Email CV and application to: progressivedentistrydublin@gmail.com.


Part-time associate dentist required for state-of-the-art clinic in Dublin. Minimum three years’ experience. Please Email: carol.moroney@redmondmolloy.ie.

Associate required two to three days a week in Kerry practice. Tel: 087-799 6807, or Email: beanoriordan@eircom.net.

North West Ireland – Associate dentist required to replace departing colleague in modern, fully computerised dental and implant centre. Excellent opportunity for successful applicant. Tel: 0044-78-9658-5557, or Email CV to: info@derrylindental.co.uk.

Enthusiastic ethical associate dentist wanted for part-time position in Co. Galway general practice. Contact John and Cathy, Tel: 086-394 7071, or Email: catherine.ann.burke@gmail.com.

Experienced dentist required in Dublin. Busy, modern, digital practice. Full-time position with immediate start date. Please send your CV to: emmet@smiles.ie.

Locum required for maternity leave from January, for approximately six months. Busy single surgery practice. SOE. Minimum three years’ experience essential. Email CVs to abbyleixdentalpractice@ireland.com.
Locum required for immediate start, approximately three to four days per week for four weeks in busy modern Co. Galway practice. Email: tuamdental@hotmail.com.

Locum dental associate wanted starting December for busy Southside Dublin practice. Computerised, digital x-ray. Must have experience. Please Email CV to: dentiststdc@hotmail.com.

Periodontist required for a very successful dental clinic in Blackrock, Dublin. On a session basis. Immediate start. Please contact Grace, Tel: 086-264 8970.

Experienced full-time hygienist required. Full-time. Two rural practices. A long-term view is required. Please submit your CV to jamespturner@eircom.net.

Dental nurse/receptionist (full-time) wanted – minimum two years’ experience – for Dublin City Centre practice. Please forward your CV to surgerydental@hotmail.com.

Dental nurse required. Swords area. Must be qualified, experienced and computer literate with great organisational and interpersonal skills. Email CV to: dentaljobswords@gmail.com (no agency please).

Experienced dental nurse required full-time, Dublin 18. Must have experience in both nursing and reception. Email CVs to: southdublindentist4@gmail.com.

Dental nurse/receptionist required for new South County Dublin practice. Twenty-five hours a week with view to full-time. Experience essential. Please Email CV to: jobs@sallybrackdental.ie.

Full-time qualified dental nurse required for multi-disciplinary practice in Ballsbridge. Applicants must be well presented and enthusiastic, with good communication and clinical skills – 38 hours per week. Minimum salary €26k. Position available immediately. Please Email: appts@visiondental.ie.

Dental surgery assistant required for busy practice in Killaloe, Co. Clare. Three-day week required commencing September. No agencies. Computer literacy essential. Please Email CV with cover letter to killaloedental@gmail.com.

Dental surgery assistant required part-time for busy Dublin Northside practice. Computer literacy essential. Please email CV with cover letter to: andrewwatherell@gmail.com.

EQUIPMENT FOR SALE
Equipment for sale: surgery units (Beaver) and full surgery equipment (used). Tel: 087-997 7589.

EQUIPMENT WANTED
Wanted – second-hand dental equipment for new surgery. Please Tel: 087-699 3487.

Equipment wanted for new practice opening shortly. Everything needed – chairs (delivery units preferred), x-ray cameras, handpieces, dentist and nurse chairs, compressor, suction, reception desk, office furniture, waiting room furniture, etc. Will consider collection from anywhere. Email: longdentcent@gmail.com.

Second-hand dental equipment wanted for a complete surgery. Tel: 085-238 8543.

PREMISES FOR SALE/TO LET
Dental premises to let opposite Knocklyon Shopping Centre. Excellent location with superb road frontage. Dentist previously practised in this surgery for 30 years. Rent negotiable. Tel: 087-224 6764 to arrange viewing.


For sale. Busy dental practice – well equipped – in South Dublin area. Excellent location. Established 30 years plus. Email: dublindental@yahoo.ie.

Brand new surgery to let in a medical centre. First floor, Glenageary Shopping Centre. Flexible terms, good footfall and pleasant environment to work in. Contact David, Tel: 086-242 4746.