Behind the scenes:
Designing interactive learning sessions for the 2016 EAO congress

Staging a major scientific event like the EAO Congress requires meticulous planning, and the process begins at least two years before the congress starts. One of the first tasks is the appointment of a Scientific Committee to develop and implement the scientific programme. This includes proposing an overall theme, and identifying a faculty of appropriately qualified and representative speakers. Doing this successfully means bringing together established experts with the next generation of emerging clinicians and researchers.

In 2014, I was appointed to the Scientific Committee for the EAO’s meeting in Paris, which will take place from 29 September to 1 October 2016. I was tasked with organising two interactive sessions for the meeting, focusing on treatment planning. The aim of this style of session is to provide a richer and more stimulating learning experience for delegates, where they participate in the outcome of the discussion and real-world clinical situations are assessed and evaluated in real time. This paper describes the methodology I and my colleagues on the Scientific Committee have used to put together two interactive sessions for the Paris meeting.

Mastering any clinical dental procedure requires the acquisition of manual skills through training and practice. But how does the dental professional learn how to formulate a proper treatment plan? There are a plethora of theoretical lectures and hands-on courses available on new techniques and the use of materials and instrumentation. However, teaching treatment planning is a complex endeavour that requires a completely different approach. The educator or educating team must have a broad and thorough preparation, and has to be ready to show the students a variety of well-documented clinical cases. These must exemplify the thought process behind the clinical decisions taken, combined with the long-term outcome, in order to demonstrate their reliability.

Developing the expertise to plan a therapy that takes all patient-specific variables into account requires a broad range of skills. These include a good dose of clinical experience, along with evidence-based information on the predictability of the different clinical procedures, and an understanding of their correct sequence. And this takes time, an honest engagement with one’s peers, and an open mind.

Part of my remit in organising the two treatment planning sessions for the 2016 congress was that they demonstrated clear learning value. This has to be set in the context of an international event that attracts thousands of colleagues who will be convening in a plenary session. The limitations include:

- a heterogeneity in the level of knowledge of the audience
- a limit to the extent that those attending can participate in the discussion
- a short time-frame

Reflecting this, I put forward two different formulas, each of which I believe offers important learning opportunities, but in different ways.

1. In one session, a complex clinical case will be presented and will then be discussed by two teams of three clinicians representing different specialties. The discussion will be guided by a moderator. Each team will receive in advance details of the initial patient presentation (clinical chart, radiographs, extraoral and intraoral photographs and any other pertinent information). Based on this information, they will prepare a formal presentation in which they explain their treatment proposal and its rationale. After the moderator has discussed the two proposals, the presenter will reveal the therapy that was actually performed.

2. The second session will focus on situations that are characterised by a limited clinical problem. Once again, a moderator will conduct the verbal exchange between the presenter and an expert panel, this time consisting of four different specialists: a periodontist, an oral surgeon/implantologist, an orthodontist and a prosthodontist. This time, the panel won’t see the clinical cases beforehand. So it will react to the presentation in real time along with the audience. The aim is to introduce an element of spontaneity which will bring the audience closer to the panel. After the case has been discussed, the presenter will reveal the treatment that was carried out.

These two styles of presentation have been developed to demonstrate the vastly different approaches needed when considering different cases. In scenario two, the clinical pathology or problem to be treated is limited (but not necessarily ‘simple’), whereas scenario one will examine a situation where the approach to the treatment of the patient must be comprehensive and may require a multidisciplinary strategy.

However, the selection of specific formulas for demonstrating how a treatment plan can or should be devised and discussed is only part of the requirement for a successful session. It is vital that participants learn something valuable and useful that they can apply in their practices. What is going to make the difference are the qualities – and not just the qualifications – of the people involved in the various roles on stage.

Stefano Gracis received his DMD degree in 1986 from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, and in 1987 from the University of Pavia, Italy. In 1990, under the guidance of Professor Ralph Yuodelis, he obtained the certificate in Prosthodontics with an MSD degree at the University of Washington, Seattle. He is President-Elect of the European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry (EAED) and Past President of the Italian Academy of Prosthetic Dentistry (AIOP). He is on the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Prosthodontics and of the International Journal of Esthetic Dentistry. He lectures and gives courses regularly, both nationally and internationally, on topics related to fixed prosthodontics and implant prosthodontics. He practices in his own clinic in Milan, Italy, limiting his activity to prosthodontics and restorative dentistry.
the presenter has to be a clinician of recognised skills, with a solid background and experience in discussing and defending treatment planning decisions. He or she must prepare an interesting clinical case that is well documented in all aspects, and that ideally has medium to long-term follow-up documentation.

the moderator is the key figure of the session. Like the conductor of an orchestra, he/she must be able to push the discussion in the right direction and understand when to call in the various characters. It is his/her role to extract the information that is interesting for the audience, and to summarise the major points that should be stressed. The moderator needs to be dynamic, understand the various disciplines involved, have a good handle on the relevant literature, and never forget the clinical value of the exercise.

like the presenter, the experts have to be recognised clinicians with hands-on experience in the treatment of a range of clinical situations within their specialty. They don’t have to demonstrate how good they are (the audience will assume or know this already), but instead they must describe the thought processes they use to make a clinical decision, and the importance of collecting certain clinical data.

I am confident that the dental professionals selected for these two sessions all fit the job description perfectly and that they will contribute to a constructive learning experience for all those attending. I am looking forward to seeing many of you in Paris.

TREATMENT PLANNING SESSION 1 – Clinical case with a ‘complex’ problem or in need of an extensive rehabilitation

- Presenter: Dr Andrea Ricci (IT)
- Moderator: Dr Michael Cohen (USA)
- Team 1 (North America): Dr Sonia Leizy (CAN) (periodontist/implant surgeon), Dr Ward Smalley (USA) (orthodontist), and Dr Brahm Miller (CAN) (prosthodontist)
- Team 2 (Europe): Dr Rino Burkhardt (CH) (periodontist/implant surgeon), Marc Schaetzle (CH) (orthodontist), and Joerg Strub (GER) (prosthodontist)

TREATMENT PLANNING SESSION 2 – Cases with a ‘limited’ clinical problem, but that could still require a multidisciplinary approach

- Presenter: Professor Christoph Hämmerle (CH)
- Moderator: Dr Ueli Grunder (CH)
- Expert panel: Dr Myron Nevins (USA) (periodontist); Dr Hannes Wächtel (GER) (implant surgeon); Dr David De Franco (IT) (orthodontist); Professor Petra Guess (GER) (prosthodontist)