

From loupes to air polishing

A dental practitioner's journey integrating new products

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Over the course of my career—40 years in dental hygiene, 30 years working in prosthodontic and periodontal practices, and 15 years in education—I've seen many changes in the tools we use and in how we think about patient care. Dentistry looks very different today from when I first started, and so much of that difference comes from technology.

When new products come out, we need to decide if they help us work smarter, not harder. We only have so much time with our patients, and I want to make that time count. I'm always on the lookout for products that will give good results while also giving patients that “wow” experience.

My first step is to try new products on myself or with people I trust—family, friends, patients I know will give me honest feedback. Then I weigh their opinions against what I see clinically.

How ultrasonics changed my outlook

Right after dental hygiene school, I started working with periodontists, which was challenging work. Back then, I did all the surgery preps with hand scalers. We didn't have slim-line instruments, the blades were bulky, nor did we have today's variety. I would tease the periodontists that their job was easy—they'd flap and go straight in, while I was



Image courtesy of HuFriedy Group

the one doing the heavy lifting.

When companies started making thinner ultrasonic tips, everything changed. Scaling and root planing became more effective, less physically demanding, and patients could feel the difference. Everyone wanted one of those ultrasonics, and I convinced my periodontists to buy them. It was the first time I experienced how the right piece of equipment could completely change both my work and the patients' experience.

Seeing what the dentist sees

Another big shift came when I bought my first pair of loupes, about 18 years ago. My dentist would sometimes point out cracks he could see, but even with 20/20 vision, I couldn't see them. I decided to buy my own loupes and suddenly I could see exactly what he was seeing.

Magnification made probing and recording bleeding on probing so

much easier. I could actually see that tiny bit of blood that sometimes takes a while to come out of the pocket. I trusted my dentist, but now I could detect the cracks myself. Eventually, he bought loupes for the entire office.

Initially, my coworkers didn't want to try them. But once they did, they wouldn't work without them. I've seen that pattern more than once: hesitation at the start, then full adoption once people see the results.

Winning people over with results

I saw the same thing happen when locally applied antibiotics first came out. I started using them on my nonsurgical therapy cases, but my coworkers were skeptical. However, when the dentist saw my results were about 1 mm more pocket reduction than hand scaling alone, he stepped in and said, “We're all going to do this.”

Patients were happy with the results, and happy patients tell their friends and family, bringing more referrals and benefiting the whole practice.

What I look at when evaluating products

When I'm deciding whether to bring in new technology, I focus on a few things: results, efficiency, return on investment, and the reputation of the company. I'm an avid reader. I read studies from the United States and other countries. Once I feel confident about the results, I'll suggest it to the practice.

Of course, dentists want to look at the numbers. If they're going to invest thousands of dollars, they want to know how it's going to pay off. My approach is to show how efficiency and patient satisfaction can lead to growth. Patients who are comfortable are happy to return, and they tell their friends.

I pay attention to patient comfort. I listen to what they say, but I also watch body language. Are they clenching their jaw? Tightening their hands? Leaving little claw marks on the chair? These are tell-tale signs just as much as their words. My goal is to make my patient's experience comfortable as well as effective.

Testing the PWR Pair

That focus on comfort is what made me so interested in the PWR Pair. I tried it first on coworkers. One was especially hesitant because her teeth are hypersensitive. By the time she sat in my chair, it had been over a year since her last maintenance visit, and she was nervous. Since she always needed local anesthesia for SRP, I had it ready, but told her, "In my experience, piezo scalers are a lot less sensitive than magnetostrictive ones. Let's

see how you do." At first, she was gripping the chair, but as I started, she relaxed. To her amazement, I never had to give local anesthesia. That day, I won over a very anxious patient.

Why biofilm disruption matters

Another reason I was interested in the PWR Pair is the research we have on glycine and biofilm. We know how important it is to disrupt biofilm, not just for oral health but for the oral-systemic link. This unit allows me to use either glycine or sodium bicarbonate, so it works for different patients' needs. It's effective subgingivally and gentle on soft tissues

The piezo handpiece is also very quiet, which helps patients relax because it doesn't make that high-pitched noise we get from other ultrasonic units. For hygienists, this matters too—noise may cause problems over time, and with this unit I don't need to wear earplugs. It cuts down on hand scaling, which saves time and strain on my body. It's great for orthodontic patients and implants. Some hygienists feel uneasy working around implants, but this system is safe and predictable.

Features that make a difference

What really stands out to me is how the unit adjusts itself. I can start at the default power, and if it senses heavy calculus, it shifts to a higher setting automatically. When I know a patient will need more power, I can also set it manually. It feels like the unit is working with me.

Cleaning and decontamination are simple, and the disposable perio tips are slim enough to be comfortable for patients. That's important. I don't want patients to dread their appointments. Anything that makes it easier and

more comfortable helps with compliance and long-term results.

Getting buy-in at the office

When I believe in something, I do my homework and present my findings to the practice owner. We discuss the pros and cons, and then I'll usually arrange a demo so everyone can see for themselves. Getting buy-in from the dental team is important.

That said, sometimes I may implement a product because I have a strong feeling it's going to work. I'm not afraid of change—it invigorates me. Once people see positive results, they usually come around. Sharing outcomes, demonstrating how a product works, and offering training all help to shift attitudes.

Practicing smarter

Looking back, the theme across my career is my willingness to try something new when it may make a difference for patients. From those challenging days of prepping patients for periodontal surgery with bulky hand scalers, to the moment I first put on loupes, to seeing a coworker relax during her first appointment with the PWR Pair—it all comes back to the same goal.

For me, adopting new products isn't about change for the sake of change. It's about practicing smarter, not harder, and giving patients the best that we can offer. **DE**

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