I admit that I love conventions. We meet old friends there, discover a foreign city and generally have a good time. We also learn and discover small details and new facets about clinical issues we had not thought of previously, but that have the potential to improve the way we practise and allow us to better enjoy the end results we strive for in treating our patients.

The other day, a speaker remarked that, through all the new changes and developments we experience in our profession, half of the things we do today we did differently only five years before. What a provocative idea it was! His assertion, however, was not wrong. I actually do very little of the things I learnt in dental school 40 years ago.

The essence of that idea is that happiness lies in all the challenges and discoveries we encounter and overcome on a daily basis. In my humble opinion, our professional lives closely resemble a moving train; we can either choose to be on it and enjoy the passing landscape, which changes constantly, or stand on the side of the track watching the train move away. For me, a changing landscape has always been more attractive. Reading the biographies of our clinical gurus, it is always wonderful to see that they have remained passionate about their profession until old age regardless of their other, private interests.

At conventions, we regard outstanding lectures the same way as we appreciate an excellent movie. The knowledge and clinical results we obtain through the presenters’ intelligence, innovation and courage are of ten impressive. This is where our work starts. Having returned to our practices, we need to optimize our newly obtained knowledge for the benefit of our patients and in order to compete with our evermore competent colleagues. We must be able to recognize the best of what we have learnt and integrate it into our professional lives.

Our personal experience is essential to understanding the implications of those messages and to overcoming our own biases, which are often difficult to identify. There is the risk of a speaker presenting an average result

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**Optimising clinical excellence**

By Dr Jean-Nicolas Hasson, France

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as an outstanding success. We have to return to the basics to assess the findings presented to us. Our subjective evaluation allows us to take the most appropriate and apply it to our practice through optimising the technical excellence that was presented to us. We realise after all these years the tremendous progress we have made owing to these lectures: our first implants were retained over time, then we learnt to place implants in all locations where the teeth had been lost, and finally we were able to achieve aesthetic implant results.

It might be tempting sometimes to give up and consider all the wonders that can be achieved as that of another world, inaccessible to our daily practices. Not at all. Our patients do not want their smiles from when they were 20 years old. While a more attractive smile has been the dream of many, this dream is often difficult to achieve because of the costs involved, such as the extended length of treatment, the pain involved or the need for strict follow-up. Furthermore, the financial costs of an ideal treatment plan are too high for most of our patients. Achieving a 20-year-old’s smile in a 50-year-old face, however, is not a desirable goal.

What we learn often only benefits a tiny fraction of our patients. By adapting a certain technique, we realise how meaningful it is. From there, we are able to extend its indications owing to the improvement of our clinical performance. Over time, the treatment becomes safe, useful, and we grasp its limits. Patients to whom we were not able to provide this treatment previously can now be treated because we have extended our knowledge. In fact, we optimise the excellence of treatment that was presented to us through our patients by adapting a technique to our environmental circumstances. In the words of Darwin: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

What attracts us to a convention are the remaining gaps in knowledge that we are already aware of: the appearance of multiple implants in the aesthetic zone, the quality of dental maintenance necessary for their survival or the treatment of peri-implantitis. What still amazes me at any meeting are all those questions that we did not even think of. For these reasons, we all will enthusiastically take the train ride to the EAO congress in Paris and enjoy the wonderful lectures that will lead us to progress in our field.

Dr Jean-Nicolas Hasson is a dentist specialising in implantology and periodontology. He maintains his own practice in Mulhouse in France.

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