

WILL THE VIRTUAL PATIENT GAIN ACCEPTANCE?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. WILHELM SCHNEIDER

DR. SCHNEIDER, WHICH DEVELOPMENTS FROM SIRONA IN THE AREA OF IMAGING SYSTEMS MEAN THAT WE CAN ALREADY TALK ABOUT A "VIRTUAL PATIENT"?

The first step towards creating virtual patients was the connection between CAD/CAM and 3D x-rays. Using the unique process of Integrated Implantology, Sirona made it possible to integrate a virtually constructed dental restoration into a 3D x-ray image. And now another step has been taken towards this vision of virtual patients: the integrated FaceScanner in GALILEOS.

AT THE MOMENT THE GALILEOS FACESCANNER IS MOSTLY A TOOL TO IMPROVE PATIENT COMMUNICATION. COULD IT ALSO BE USED FOR DIAGNOSTIC PURPOSES IN FUTURE?

By combining CBCT scans, CAD/CAM data, and facial scans, completely new opportunities will be available in future, and not just for diagnostics.

For example, this combination and visual display of the various data will enable therapy proposals to be comprehensively communicated and the consequences for patients can be simulated in a very short time – with a large enough body of data, even long-term prognoses could be made. The next step in the development of virtual patients will be the integration of jaw movements in the CBCT scans. This is because visual analysis of the temporomandibular joints and the movements in the joints harbors a huge potential for well-founded diagnoses and new options for therapy. Another option offered by the virtual patient will be to see the patient's face smile naturally using their virtual face scan.

The provisions for this already exist. The smile could thus be used to perfect the smile design for CEREC applications.

MANY DENTAL PRACTITIONERS ARE CAUTIOUS WHEN IT COMES TO NEW DEVELOPMENTS. WHY DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO USE AN ADD-ON LIKE THE INTEGRATED FACESCANNER RIGHT NOW?

Patients are increasingly at home in a digital world made up of social media and Internet forums. Particularly for this reason, the marketing aspect of the integrated FaceScanner should not be underestimated. Patients speak about their experience with the virtual face scan and go on to recommend the dental practice. And the more complex a dental procedure, the more important it is to clearly communicate with patients. The three-dimensional display means that therapy proposals are more easily understood and this increases the acceptance of the patient.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE BEFORE THE VIRTUAL PATIENT IS STANDARD IN EVERY DENTAL PRACTICE?

It will happen quicker than many expect. Digital dentistry has rapidly advanced in recent years. The virtual patient will put diagnosis, patient consultation, and therapy on a whole new level. The first few steps towards a virtual patient have already provided greater confidence, better acceptance of therapy proposals, time savings, and greater pleasure when working in the practice.

Dr. Wilhelm Schneider is the Marketing Director of the Sirona Imaging Systems division.

