Interview: “Clear, step-by-step instructions are essential for long-term success”

By Kasper Mussche, DTI

Dental professionals should be empowered to instruct and motivate their patients to maintain proper oral hygiene. iTOP, short for individually trained oral prophylaxis, is a hands-on training programme developed by Dr Lil Hedin Mayer and organised by Swiss oral health company Curaden that teaches dental professionals to set up patients for a lifetime of perfect oral care through practice, correct tools and techniques, and motivation. Dental Tribune Online spoke to iTOP Top-Level International Lecturer and Instructor Dr Mia Girotto—a driving force behind iTOP’s success—who has been training professionals and students worldwide for over 12 years.

iTOP gives knowledge to dental students and professionals. What do you expect them to take from a session? Visitors to an iTOP training session can expect to finally learn how to brush their teeth correctly.

Our aim is for dental students and professionals to realise that they are patients as well and should incorporate the correct use of tools, techniques and knowledge taught during our seminars into their own oral health regimens. They should realise one needs many iTOP sessions to get to the desired level of knowledge and practice, and retain this. As such, clear, step-by-step instructions are essential for long-term success. It is based on practising our knowledge on a daily basis for ourselves and, eventually, on motivating and setting up patients for a lifetime of optimal oral health. Secondly, we want them to get interested and involved in iTOP, and get them to realise the potential of iTOP’s philosophy for their work. So in short: practise what we preach, recall for us as well. We are patients too: the rules apply to us as well.

What is the advantage of an iTOP session for professionals? In many things dentistry, you can do the perfect job, whether it be as a general dentist, specialist or technician, but if there is no compliance from the patient, restorations or other medical procedures will end up in failure. Regardless of the excellence of the work that was put in, patients should be correctly trained and motivated to maintain good oral hygiene after a procedure. If dental professionals taught their patients the correct techniques, and gave them the correct tools and knowledge, this would definitely set them apart from other professionals and would also prevent failure.

Aside from your iTOP activities, you work as a periodontist and implantologist. How does that influence your vision for iTOP? iTOP has definitely been very useful in complementing these two fields. In both, success rates are very dependent on proper oral hygiene maintenance and patient motivation.

How can dental professionals motivate their patients? There are many ways to motivate a patient. There are even documented schools and methods, but some of the basic advice would be: do not argue with the patient, find out what his or her own reason is for the visit and stick with that. Try to be as supportive as possible and keep in mind that this is a process that needs time—even the smallest progression deserves acknowledgement.

You have been an iTOP trainer and teacher since 2006. How have you seen the programme and prevention in general change? If I have to be very honest, the biggest changes I have seen are in the market. When I first started giving iTOP lectures, I would often joke about the market following the iTOP lead. Ten years later, we are witnessing this exact thing happening. As for the iTOP programme itself, it has adapted to certain cultural and national specifics, but other than that, the core really has not changed much, as it is easy and understandable. Of course, we still discuss, debate and always strive to improve.

How does iTOP fit in with the Curaden philosophy? When I say I have gained a new family, and made many friends and met so many wonderful people and colleagues along the way, it has become a passion, an inseparable part of me both professionally and privately. I really do enjoy giving lectures on iTOP and training people.

What about your vision for the future? Where do you want to see iTOP go personally? A long time ago, I jokingly said, “It’s time for iTOP to conquer the world.” What I meant by that is that I want iTOP’s benefits, knowledge and techniques to become available to every person in the world, not only dental professionals.