

*Compiled by Geoffrey M. Knight*

## Better, faster, cheaper

**An article in *New Scientist* about NASA's latest approach to space exploration, a billboard promoting Telstra Internet and a current text about marketing services all share a common theme.**

### **Better, faster, cheaper**

The diverse sources of this phrase are an indication of how much these three words have become the basis upon which acceptable performance is measured in our pressure-cooked society.

It is difficult to relate this concept to dental care when so many services are:

### **Complex, slow, expensive**

This may explain some of the pressure by governments to make dentistry more competitive in an environment where so many dental services have become irrelevant and out of reach to large sections of society.

Incorporating the philosophy of today's successful enterprises may well appease a better informed and well educated public, limit government and third party intervention and assure a viable future for the dental profession.

### **Better**

As a biological science, minimal intervention and the preservation of healthy tissues are the cornerstones of optimal dental care.

Why is research carried out on the technology of new prosthetic processes instead of looking at ways of achieving aesthetical and functional restorative outcomes without having to subject teeth to the removal of healthy tooth structure?

Resin dentine bonding systems form highly stressed mechanical bonds to active biological surfaces and are continually being upgraded and improved as each generation is plagued by residual post operative sensitivity and the failure to reliably provide more than 3 years adhesion to non enamel bounded restorations.

Furthermore the toxic water soluble resins (HEMA) found in dentine bonding systems and resin modified glass ionomer cements may be the cause of much post operative sensitivity in susceptible individuals, potentially limiting the use of these materials against vital dentine.

Glass ionomer cements have been used clinically for over 20 years. They are biomimetic and exhibit evidence of an ionic bond to tooth structure. Glass ionomer cements further demonstrate potential therapeutic benefits of remineralizing affected dentine and inhibiting caries by fluoride release and buffering acidic solutions in their immediate environment.

The new generation of wear resistant glass ionomer cements enjoys all these attributes as well as demonstrating an improved resistance to occlusal wear. These materials offer real opportunities in many clinical situations as preferred restoratives.

### **Faster**

Survival in a post industrial society relies upon access to information and the managed allocation of time.

The income a dentist generates is a function of the fee for a service and the time it takes to provide that service. Ten minutes saved in placing a restoration that normally requires half an hour results in a productivity increase of 50 per cent.

Improvements in efficiency does not mean cutting corners but a structured attempt to look beyond established treatment modalities to find creative techniques of using new materials as they become available.

Direct techniques provide solutions to many dental problems and save considerable amounts of time compared to indirect techniques.

### **Cheaper**

Cheaper means looking at various clinical situations and seeking solutions with lower biological and fiscal costs than current treatment modalities.

Single tooth implants have useful clinical applications but are time consuming with high biological and fiscal costs. In many situations a direct fibre reinforced resin bridge provides a low cost and reversible solution that enables patients to

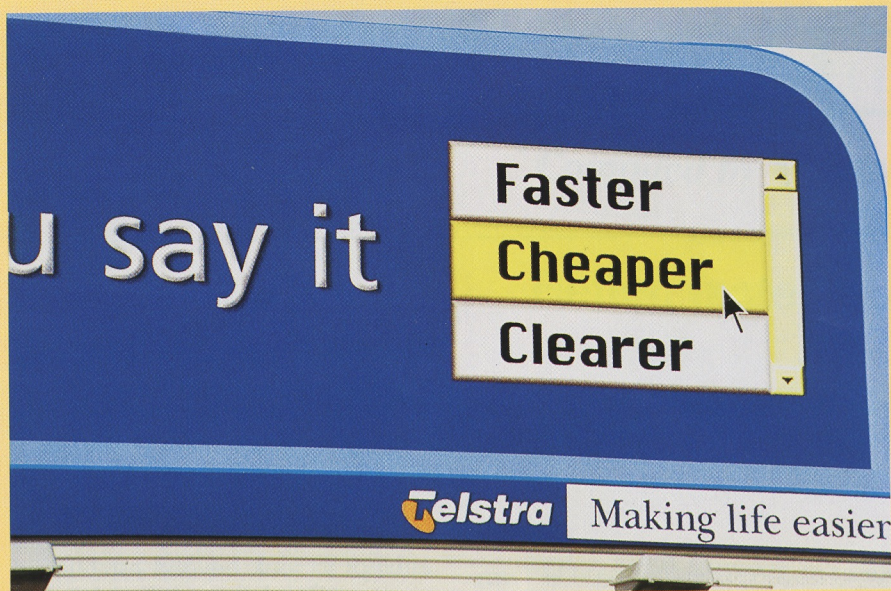


Fig. 1. Telstra billboard promoting Faster, Cheaper and Clearer (Better) Internet services.

access a wide range of clinical options at a future time.

The advent of a reflective laser diagnostic instrument (Diagnodent) combined with air abrasion technology has enabled dentists to diagnose and treat dental caries earlier and less invasively than was previously possible.

Restoring teeth prepared in this manner with wear resistant glass ionomer cements creates a minimally invasive caries resistant restoration (**better**) in far less time than an equivalent composite resin or amalgam restoration (**faster**) enabling dentists to pass on productivity improvements to their patients (**cheaper**).

### Marketing the benefits

Dentists who adopt these philosophies into their practices will often find a steadily increasing demand for their services.

It is possible to become busier in two ways:

- providing the same services for more people
- providing more services for the same people.

Seeking more patients for the same services generally requires advertising that forces other local dentists to respond, to the delight of those providing advertising mediums.

Providing patients with a greater range of clinical options not only increases a dentist's immediate workload but creates a powerful referral base from grateful patients.

### Conclusions

In summation, there is a need to constantly review treatment modalities to improve clinical outcomes and avoid focusing on existing processes. Current acceptable levels of performance must drive changes to create better, faster and cheaper services for dental consumers. □