



The decline and fall of the perio empire?

In spite of the efforts of all those who have devoted their professional life to demonstrating that the conservation of teeth depends on the health of periodontal tissues, and in spite of research proving that access to periodontal treatment is essential to meet the current therapeutic needs of the population, periodontology is going through a growth crisis which appears more like a decline.

We have to acknowledge that, since the 1990s (marked by the excessive promotion of regeneration techniques), few compelling innovations have appeared from research laboratories. In the literature, articles dedicated exclusively to periodontal diseases are rare, and often do not appeal to clinicians.

Of course, dentistry is not spared by current trends. Our profession follows the tide of innovation, and naturally the interest of practitioners gravitates towards the use of new materials and technologies. The advent of osseointegration is one of the most important scientific events of the last 20 years, and the development of implant techniques offers seemingly miraculous solutions for edentulous patients.

We cannot accuse implantology of attracting those who ignore periodontology; we can only regret that micro-economics persuades practitioners to direct their treatments to less conservative and more profitable options, and therefore fall to the temptation of extracting teeth in favour of implants. Considering the increased number of implants placed by periodontists, we may wonder if tooth conservation is still the main objective of periodontal treatment ...

Almost all periodontal meetings dedicate approximately 50% of their programme to implantology. Several societies have changed their names to societies of 'Periodontology and Oral Implantology', and consequently most of the European societies of periodontology have lost their identity. Worse, by trying to finance their activities through 'sponsorship', the congress organisers are widely influenced by the implant companies and adopt marketing messages that may be in opposition to the periodontist's true role.

Yet, the "macro-economic" picture is quite different. Periodontitis remains one of the most prevalent of chronic human diseases and a major cause of tooth loss. It has become increasingly linked to systemic health morbidity (e.g. type 2 diabetes), whose costs to the global health care economy are spiralling out of control. We must focus more on how periodontal prevention can not only improve oral health and wellbeing, but also improve general health and reduce the huge costs associated with those conditions. To become a recognised speciality across the world, periodontology has to remain a major and independent discipline, and be careful not to succumb to the increasing trend towards exodontia endoimplantologica!

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