

Streamlined, cost-cutting post-treatment dental advice via iPad

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Credit: Case Western Reserve University

With increased numbers of baby boomers using technology, Case Western Reserve University researchers investigate streamlined, cost-cutting post-treatment advice

Researchers at Case Western Reserve University's School of Dental Medicine are exploring whether using technology—rather than a self-care professional to give patients' follow-up care instructions—might be an effective, cost cutting means to streamline patient self-care.

The research team evaluated 60 patients, looking at participants' willingness and ability to follow oral hygiene instructions given by computer rather than directly from a health care professional.

"In [health care](#), we are not only preparing for an influx of elderly patients and a growing global middle-class wanting to improve quality of life, but also trying to keep a lid on the skyrocketing costs of care delivery," said Leena Palomo, associate professor in the Department of Periodontics, who designed the project. "The challenge is how we can help more people who need it and help cut the already high cost of care delivery."

"This is a new pathway to manage a self-care communication to the expected large numbers of people who need it," she added.

"Think about it: your care professional teaches you how to floss, how to brush. You ask questions, you leave. The conversation takes between eight to 10 minutes."

But what if technology could work just as well? There is an opportunity to cut the costs of self-care instruction.

On a mobile device, such as an iPad like the researchers used, patients can request more guidance, have instructions repeated or learn more. Dentists could also include follow-ups and daily maintenance in an electronic platform.

The researchers divided the study subjects into two groups—those either

older or younger than 50—to assess preferences based on age. There were 30 patients in each group.

The younger group overwhelmingly preferred the tablet.

Then, the surprise: about half of the older group preferred hearing follow-up care instructions face-to-face, while the other half was indifferent about computer-assisted instructions. In other words, the older group not only didn't mind using the technology, but felt comfortable with it.

"We asked, 'Is it actually better to do this with technology?'" Palomo said. "The current 50-and-over crowd is as satisfied with technology as with the caregiver."

She said the results could be a big deal for the future of dentistry.

The idea makes sense, Palomo said, considering that the number of baby boomers—people born between 1946 and 1964—will reach an estimated 71 million by 2029, according to [US Census data](#).

"It's nice to have that caregiver talk, but today's 50-year-old is tomorrow's 70-year old," she said. "That's what gave rise to this testing."

Using a tablet or other device for giving self-care instructions shows promise for potential applications in other areas of medicine as well, Palomo said, such as self-care for diabetic and chronic-obstructive pulmonary disease [patients](#).

The research warrants further "significant future investigation," according to the study, published this month in the *Dentistry Journal*. Follow-up studies to learn more and explore potential applications are in the works.

More information: Kristin Williams et al. Effectiveness of Oral Hygiene Instructions Given in Computer-Assisted Format versus a Self-Care Instructor, *Dentistry Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.3390/dj6010002](https://doi.org/10.3390/dj6010002)

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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