

# Implant dentistry – then and now

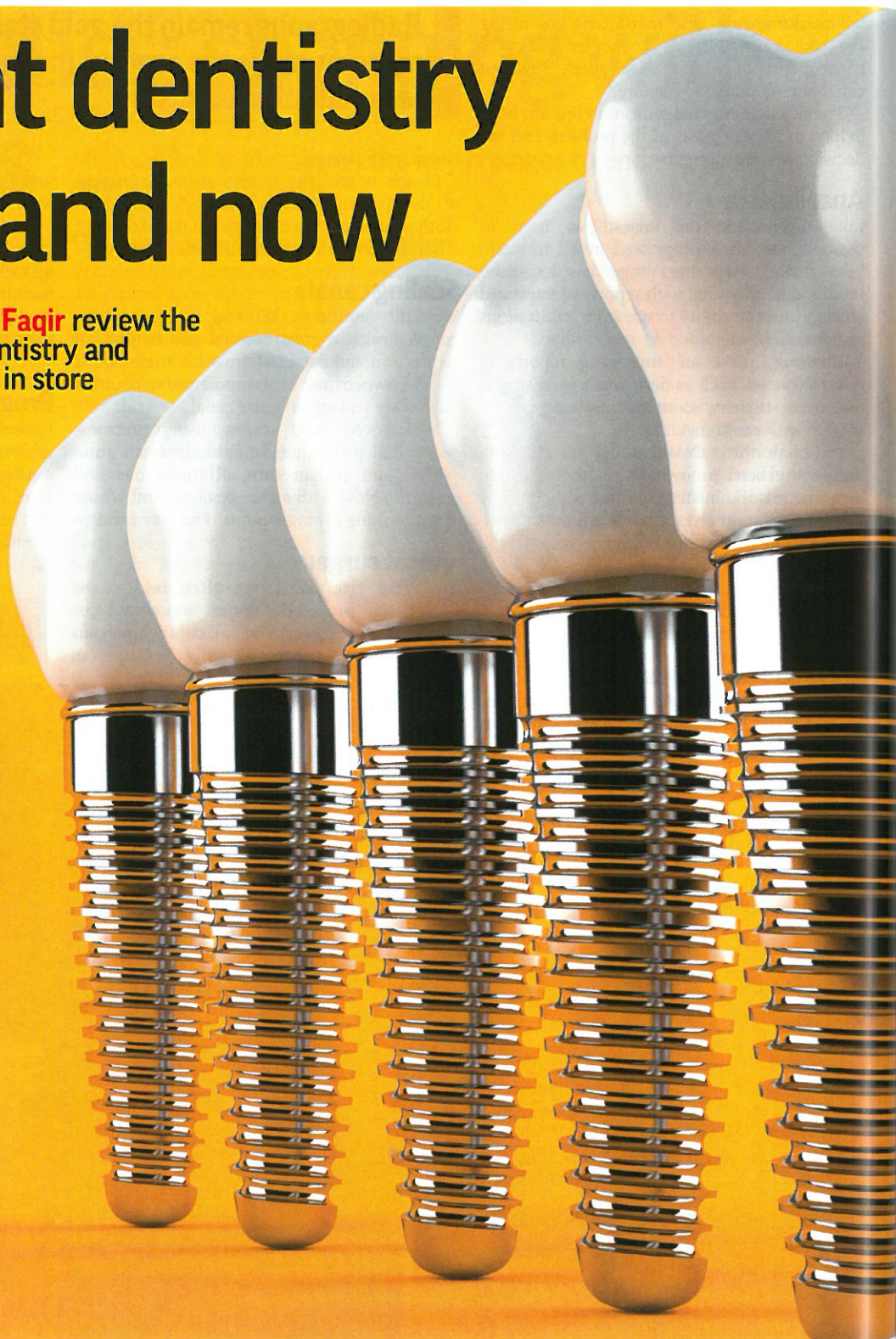
**Eimear O'Connell** and **Abid Faqir** review the past 25 years of implant dentistry and predict what the future has in store



**Eimear O'Connell**  
President of the Association  
of Dental Implantology



**Abid Faqir**  
Immediate past president of the  
Association of Dental Implantology



**AS A RELATIVELY** new field, implant dentistry has evolved rapidly. The profession today is almost unrecognisable from that of 25 years ago. Everything from the dental implant systems themselves to the related technologies and clinical techniques have changed significantly.

So, too, have patient and practitioner attitudes towards the treatment modality, which have both helped to drive the field forward.

Eimear O'Connell, president of the Association of Dental Implantology (ADI), discusses how patient demands have changed over the years: 'Patient attitudes have changed over the last couple of decades without a doubt. People value their teeth much more than they used to and they want to preserve their natural teeth. They tend to prefer dental implants over bridges, which avoids preparation of the adjacent teeth.'

'As professionals, we usually agree with this in order to provide a longer-lasting solution. Where full-mouth rehabilitation is required, dentures have fallen out of favour for many patients as well, due to their preconceived association with older people and problems with fit and comfort.'

'To meet these patient expectations while ensuring function and aesthetics, education is key – both for patients and

dental professionals. We still have an issue with education in implant dentistry. This is something the ADI wants to help with so more professionals can deliver the best patient outcomes in a safe and effective way.'

## Meeting high standards

Abid Faqir, immediate past president of the ADI, further considers the challenge presented by modern patient expectations.

'When I first started in implant dentistry, the biggest challenge was finding quality professional education. You had to travel a lot and there were only a limited number of mentors available. Patient education and knowledge also wasn't great, so you had to work hard to educate patients to assist in consent and acceptance.'

'Today, this challenge has been turned on its head. Patients have access to so much information – through internet marketing and social media, for example – that they have become very astute about what treatment can achieve. Meeting the high standards they desire can be difficult, and managing their expectations in complex cases even more so.'

Clearly, a lot has happened in dentistry over the past 25 years. Eimear shares what she feels have been the biggest changes in the dental implant field during this time.

## The introduction of immediate dental implants has changed the landscape extensively, offering new treatment possibilities for more patients

'Once upon a time, repeated dental visits were required for patients to complete treatment,' she says. 'Dental implants were also only provided by a very few clinicians, so access was limited.'

'Today, by using 3D imaging technologies and digital workflows, dentists can simplify and streamline procedures so patients need only attend a total of two to three visits instead of six to seven. As people value solutions that don't impact too much on their time, this is a big advantage. In addition, many more clinicians provide dental implants now.'

'The greatest invention in the field, for me, has been the digital workflow. With several in-house digital technologies, we can show patients their images and radiographs to help them better understand the procedure. This increases treatment uptake, while educating them about their oral health. We can also marry 3D images of bone, sinuses and nerves with intraoral scans for accurate and effective surgical planning.'

## Room for improvement

While he agrees with Eimear that digital technology has taken the dental implant field by storm, particularly over the last 10 years,

Abid adds: 'There is no doubt that the field of implant dentistry has grown significantly in size, with a huge push to get the treatment modality into general practice. More dentists are getting involved and there has been a vast increase in professional education locally, nationally and internationally – though there is still room for improvement.'

'The introduction of immediate dental implants has changed the landscape extensively, offering new treatment possibilities for more patients.'

'Finally, the number of female dentists in the field has grown enormously, which I think is really important for the future of our profession.'

'I'm proud the ADI is at the forefront of this movement, having elected Eimear as the first female ADI president.'

Looking ahead, Eimear offers her

predictions for the next 25 years of implant dentistry. 'I think guided surgery will become the norm rather than only being used by a few. As technologies evolve and prices go down, the accuracy of this type of treatment will attract dentists who are keen to give their patients exceptional outcomes and perhaps also protect themselves from litigation.'

Today, implant dentistry is a common treatment modality offered to patients with partial or complete edentulism. With appropriate professional training, clinically proven materials and cutting-edge technologies, dental implants can deliver outstanding function, aesthetics and longevity for a wide range of patients. **25**

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