

## Position

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Digitalisation: Taking opportunities, avoiding dangers

**Press conference on 23 January 2019 on the occasion of the 38<sup>th</sup> International Dental Show**

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President of the German Dental Association



Ladies and gentlemen,

Every other year, the International Dental Show (IDS) in Cologne presents the global state of the art of dentistry and dental technology. IDS always has its finger on the pulse of the times – this is where you will first see the trends and innovations that will be commonplace in dental practices tomorrow. Together with its partners, the Federal Chamber of Dentists (Bundeszahnärztekammer, BZÄK) always likes to take the opportunity to present itself to visitors with its own stand in this international and dynamic environment.

Digitalisation will remain the dominant topic in the dental industry in 2019. No previous development has had such a significant effect on the structures of the healthcare system in general or on professional practice and the relationship between dentists and patients in particular.

The majority of dentists view the enormous transformation potential of digitalisation with relaxed optimism. That's because our profession has always been receptive to digital opportunities – indeed, you could say that they are part and parcel of day-to-day work in a number of areas, from IT networks and 3D printing to forms of treatment and process management. These developments must in the end be reflected in the remuneration. Adjustments to the scale of charges for dentistry (Gebührenordnung für Zahnärzte, GOZ) are urgently required.

### **Digital innovations must serve patient welfare**

One example of how the advantages offered by digitalisation can be safely applied is the online dental reporting and learning system “CIRS dent – Jeder Zahn zählt!”. This platform allows dentists to discuss undesirable incidents from their everyday practice anonymously and in private.

However, there are also negative developments in the digitalised fields of dentistry. One example is how various dental suppliers offer courses for dental assistants on a CAD/CAM method for reconstructing dental restorations. After having attended a course lasting only a day and a half, they are then supposedly qualified to carry out dental services such as the construction and customisation of dentures. This is a contravention of the Dentistry Act since dental assistants are hereby carrying out tasks that only dentists are legally allowed to do. The (State) Dental Chambers have quality-assured and technically competent service offerings in this regard.

This most recent example shows that we – despite all the digital euphoria – must insist, because of our professional ethics commitment, that digital innovations always serve the well-being of patients.

### **The data sovereignty of patients must be maintained**

One important fact the digital transformation over the last few years has taught us is that this development comes with both opportunities and risks. There are practically no limits to the use of digital processes – they can lead to truly pioneering results in foundational and health-services research, in new forms of treatment and in diagnostic techniques.

But we observe with concern the way health insurance funds, insurance companies, tech groups and even some public institutions infringe on the data sovereignty of patients under the pretext of cost saving, user friendliness or administrative necessity. We would also warn against the use of apps and platforms that provide treatment tips and reviews of medical practitioners. This opens the door for abuse if positive reviews can be easily bought by the dozen for a few hundred euros.

Our politicians are also struggling to keep up with the fast pace of digital reality – see for example the electronic patient file. The Digitalisation in Healthcare Act that has been announced is therefore urgently needed.

When it comes to providing medical care and advice to patients, "Dr Google & Co." cannot hope to replace dentists. And patients are also reliant on the support provided by dentists in another way: when it comes to their data protection rights.

It is unacceptable that insurance companies and health insurance funds use patient data to offer them treatments. It is for patients – in consultation with their doctor or dentist – to decide on a medically indicated treatment. That should not be up to the algorithms of a health insurance company app!

The Federal Chamber of Dentists, together with the State Dental Chambers, is campaigning to ensure that the data sovereignty of patients and therefore also of dentists is not violated when it comes to processing the enormous volumes of unstructured health data that is collected everywhere. This is our top priority because it defends the highest principle of our profession, namely the relationship of trust between patient and dentist.

Digitalisation brings with it an almost infinite range of possibilities. These, however, must not be used if they limit the free choice of doctor/dentist, the medical practitioner's freedom to provide a treatment, our self-employed status or our professional rights. These principles guarantee the best possible quality of care for our patients. And that is the essence of our professional ethics commitment.

The Federal Chamber of Dentists is, once again, represented with its partners at IDS in Hall 11.2, Aisle O/P, Stand 50/59. You will find an overview of what's going on at the stand here:

[www.bzaek.de/fileadmin/PDFs/ids/ids\\_programmflyer\\_bzaek.pdf](http://www.bzaek.de/fileadmin/PDFs/ids/ids_programmflyer_bzaek.pdf)

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