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A low cost treatment

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Composite resins are the lowest cost option when thinking about techniques for the esthetic treatment of teeth. This characteristic, however, is little commented, but, from my point of view, taking into account daily practice in an office, cost can be decisive at the time of closing the treatment. In this column, we will throw our spotlight precisely on the low cost of the

treatments with composite resins. It is known that technology in the evolution of materials and equipment popularized dental ceramics and enabled the techniques of injection molding and CAD/CAM, which brought simplicity and made them more productive and with relatively lower cost. So, today, dental ceramics are quite popular all over the world. However, the

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cost of dental treatment with ceramics is still significantly higher when compared to composite resins. Let us see: the cost of production is directly related to the number of steps and technical knowledge to obtain the final result; a treatment that requires several steps to be performed consumes more time and materials - which raises its cost. Knowledge, which is the highest value factor in the entire production process, must also be taken into account: the greater the technical knowledge required in production, the more skilled people will be required to achieve the final result, all of which raises the cost of production. If we make a parallel considering the number of steps and technical knowledge to manufacture dental ceramics and compare with the making of composite resins, we will see that, even with technology, dental ceramic treatments still require more equipment, materials, technical knowledge, people and time. Thus, the comparative cost of composite resins compared to dental ceramics is much lower, even considering the variations of both techniques. To illustrate, I will cite an example of my clinical routine: in São Carlos/SP, a city in the countryside of São Paulo with approximately 240 thousand inhabitants, I recently attended a patient who works in trade and came to me with the desire to have her smile improved esthetically. After the initial conversation and evaluation, I observed teeth with little volume and diastema, in disharmony with the curvature of her lip and line of smile. I knew I could achieve a significant improvement in harmony with the patient's desire if I made six anterior restorations (from canine to superior canine), improving the dental shape and giving greater harmony to the smile. However, in this case, two techniques were feasible in order to restore these six superior elements:

the indirect with ceramics or direct one with composite resins. When I first suggested the indirect technique with dental ceramics, the treatment value was out of the patient's possibilities, distancing her from the desire of having her smile improved. In the sequence, I presented the resin treatment composed by the direct technique, which suited her financial planning and made possible to fulfill her desire as a patient and my own as a dentist, given the reason that made her look for me (Fig 1). A low cost treatment allows meeting the patient's expectations, in addition to making it possible for a greater number of people, which generates great satisfaction to patients and us dentists. It is worth noticing that treatments with composite resins and ceramics should not be considered as "twins" whose only difference is cost. In all previous columns, I was concerned with individualizing these two techniques in each of their different characteristics. These treatments have many differences, but they resemble as to the possible esthetic result and can be both indicated to solve cases of dental esthetics, considering the peculiarities of each technique.

It would be outstanding if factors such as mechanical and biological properties were the only ones relevant in a patient's decision to have their teeth esthetically restored with ceramics or composite resins. However, we know that the price is decisive when closing the treatment. Notice that this is the first time that I use the word price in this text, because there is an important difference between cost, price and value. Cost is precisely the amount of money needed to have the treatment performed - which takes into account the chosen technique, as discussed above. Price is how much money the patient pays to have the



Figure 1: Direct composite resin treatment.

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treatment performed. And value, for me the most important of the three, has to do with the result: it is the value assigned to the treatment, that is, how much the treatment means to the receiving patient. It is precisely this value that makes the treatment seem expensive or cheap. If the result of a treatment is given a higher value than the price paid to have such a result, the patient considers to have had a significant potential gain, and considers themselves happy with what they received, compared to what they had to invest financially. So, and only in

this way, we can say that there was success, because the result met, or even exceeded, their expectations. Note that this goes far beyond the material or technique: this is dentistry affecting people's lives, which is a great responsibility, with real potential for worsening or improvement, in the intimate dependence of the professional identifying the patient's real needs, indicating the most appropriate treatment, executing the technique with mastery and keeping the follow-up over the years. This is our profession. And this is enthralling!