

# Digital smile design meets orthodontics: Full-day course closes second EAS Congress

Interview with Dr Christian Coachman  
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According to Dr Christian Coachman, orthodontics is a specialty that should be integrated into digital smile design (DSD) and it is essential to understand the importance of this. For better DSD, it is necessary to understand orthodontics as a specialty firstly to know which cases could benefit from tooth movement and how, secondly to convince the restorative dentist about this benefit, and lastly to help the dentist educate and motivate the patient about this option, to increase case acceptance. Because to Coachman aligners are the future when it comes to moving teeth, coming to Venice in Italy for the second Congress of the European Aligner Society (EAS) was a good opportunity to participate in an event dedicated to aligners and orthodontics. He presented a post-congress course on DSD and aligners, with a whole-day programme of lectures and a live patient demonstration.

**Dr Coachman, you just arrived in Venice, so thank you for taking the time to sit and talk with me. I'd like to start by asking how you got started in dentistry and later the DSD concept.**

I started in dentistry because my whole family is in dentistry. My father, my uncle, my grandfather are all dentists. I decided just to follow in that line. My father never pushed me to follow in his tracks. As a teenager, I never went to his office or thought of becoming a dentist; it was more a last-minute decision for me to try dental school. My dream was to become an architect and designer, but for some reason, I decided that I would probably have a better life if I was to become a dentist. I don't remember why I picked dentistry over architecture; it feels now as if I just ended up in dental school.

Anything related to art and visual skills always attracted me and, somehow, maybe my intuition, lineage, guided me to decide to go into dentistry. So I picked dentistry without knowing that I could become an architect of the smile and it took me a few years to actually find myself happy in the dental profession.

At first, I thought I had made a mistake. I did not enjoy the beginning of my dental studies, and once I finished dental school, I went on to art school because I realised I did not want to become a dentist, but in my first year of art school and with teachers explaining the principles of



harmony, proportion, design, arrangement and illusion, the first thing that came to my mind was the smile. I realised I could be an artist of the smile and went back to dentistry and started DSD. One never knows how destiny will guide you. One just has to trust that everything happens for a reason.

**It seems that many dentists specialised in restorative dentistry have either studied or worked as dental technicians. Do you think it is a prerequisite for becoming a great restorative dentist or is it enough if one works with a talented dental technician?**

It is impossible to be a good restorative dentist without understanding dental technology. Many dental technicians have gone to dental school to become dentists. The difference for me is that I was both, but decided to keep working as a dental technician. Most people become dentists who are also dental technicians, but I did the opposite. It gave me the opportunity to work with many great dentists and partner them as a technician. In this way, I worked with most of my mentors and that was an interesting decision because it made me unique. Even though I could work as a dentist, I prefer to work as a technician for a dentist.

This knowledge and understanding of the other's specialty allows for better and faster communication. We can create plans together at a different level.

I think that, before being a very good specialist, one needs to be an amazing generalist. One needs to understand a little bit of everything, have a comprehensive, global understanding. It is then possible to choose what we like the most and specialise in that field. The problem is that sometimes people specialise without seeing the big picture and I think it is a limitation.

**What do you see as being the most important skill or skills to become a smile designer?**

A problem in dentistry that we need to address is the separation between the specialties. An example would be that, for me, it is a great honour to be here. Orthodontics is a new world to me. It makes me understand, realise, that I knew very little about it and orthodontists know very little of my world, restorative dentistry. We need to close this gap and that is one of the things that are very important to become a smile designer.

If one is an orthodontist, one is a smile designer; if one does restorative dentistry, one is a smile designer; if one performs orthognathic surgery, one is a smile designer, but a true smile designer connects everything, and unfortunately, there is still a separation. We need to understand better that the patient does not care what one's specialty is. As a dentist, one needs to become an orofacial expert, to go beyond dentistry, to understand the face, the lip dynamics, plastic surgery, dermatology, a little bit of all the specialties, because the patient deserves a comprehensive planning, and to understand what is best for the patient, one needs an understanding beyond the specialties to have a complete picture. That is the main skill for a modern smile designer, understanding the big picture. It is necessary to understand the basics to be able to educate the patient about the possibilities. I think we will become modern smile designers when we can understand a little bit about all these pieces and then be able to work as a team with specialists in all the different specialties.

**Therefore, continuing education is very important. Is it a requirement in Brazil for dentists?**

Unfortunately, it is not an obligation in Brazil. I think though that the market itself will push people into it. I see that being a complete orofacial expert makes total sense for the patient and I think people understand that. When one goes to a physician, one doesn't want one who understands only the area where one's pain is; one wants a physician with a greater vision, to understand the connections of one's pain with one's whole body. So too with a dentist: before going to a specialist, one wants a dentist that sees everything and can refer one based on this.

The dentist can help his or her patients much more than what people imagine. I like the concept of orthodontist Dr William Arnett, who became one of the top orthognathic surgeons. He said that if one wants to become

a real dentist, one needs to take care of the face from the aesthetic standpoint, the airway because the patient needs to breath well to be healthy and the bite because occlusion is essential and that connects the whole body as well in terms of posture and balance, etc. We need to extend our vision to take care of all of this.

**You are usually at congresses to lecture. Do you sometimes attend to learn, expand your knowledge?**

I don't know about orthodontic congresses, since this is one of the first I have attended, but in my area, restorative dentistry, periodontics, implantology, etc., many lectures are becoming kind of boring because people seem to have been talking about the same things for the last ten years. I think an ideal congress should provide three aspects, three types of speakers: the ultra-specialised speaker, going in depth about the details and exploring better ways to do the same things that we have been doing—usually congresses are too focused on having these presenters only—and I believe that another third of the presenters should be generalists who see the big picture and talk about a comprehensive vision, holistic integration, for example here connecting the orthodontic world with taking care of the human being as a whole, health in general, and finally, another third of the speakers should be there to talk about innovation, about thinking outside the box, and trends. These three aspects for me are important to give quality to a congress.

**I am not sure though that what is presented during congresses is actually widely used by dentists. To what extent do these trends and new technologies really find their way into practices do you think? I do hope, but am not sure that the digital approach is as widely used as it should be.**

I think there is a tendency to over-complicate things. The reality on the podium, in research, at universities and in lectures compared with the reality in the dental office, where one needs to make the patient happy, follow basic ethical principles, as well as make money and run a business, means one needs to find a balance between it all to deliver care that one can be proud of.

The digital approach is just starting; it is a huge paradigm shift and it will take time. People fight against changes and don't like to change, preferring their comfort zones, but that is not just in dentistry. There is a time of shift, then there are the early adopters, the people who have a business vision, who really make money out of these new ideas, and after a few years, the majority start to really come on board. That is the process of life. The smart people and the people who will really benefit from these changes and innovations are the ones that understand how to incorporate these ideas and create a business model around them.

**Thank you very much for your time.**