OPEN ACCESS Freely available online

ISSN: 2161-1122
Dentistry

Commentary

Digital Dentistry Workflows in Modern Clinical Practice

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DESCRIPTION

Digital dentistry workflows describe the structured use of computer-based systems and connected devices in the planning, design, and production of dental treatments. These workflows integrate clinical data capture, digital modeming, treatment simulation, and fabrication methods to support predictable clinical outcomes in restorative, prosthetic, orthodontic, and surgical procedures. The progression from conventional manual impressions and analogy records toward digital systems has altered the operational structure of dental clinics and laboratories by introducing data-driven methods and reducing dependence on physical impression materials. The process typically begins with intraoral scanning, where optical scanners capture detailed surface geometry of teeth and surrounding tissues. These scanners convert visual data into digital files that represent accurate three-dimensional models of the oral cavity. The resulting datasets are then transferred into specialized software environments where clinicians and technicians can evaluate occlusion, alignment, and restorative requirements with precision.

Once the digital impression is obtained, design software plays a central role in shaping the treatment plan. Computer-aided design programs allow the manipulation of virtual dental structures for crowns, bridges, veneers, implant abutments, and orthodontic appliances. These tools support iterative modification, enabling clinicians to refine morphology, contact points, and functional relationships before physical production begins. The integration of virtual articulation systems also helps simulate jaw movements, which assists in evaluating occlusal performance and identifying interferences that may affect long-term function. This stage reduces the likelihood of manual errors that often arise in conventional wax-up procedures and physical modelling techniques.

Following the design phase, fabrication is typically executed using computer-aided manufacturing systems. Milling machines and additive manufacturing units convert digital models into tangible restorations. Subtractive manufacturing involves carving restorations from ceramic, composite, or polymer blocks, while additive techniques construct objects layer by layer using photopolymer resins or metal powders. Each method is selected based on material requirements, mechanical strength, aesthetics, and clinical indication. The consistency of digitally produced restorations improves reproducibility and reduces variability between laboratory technicians, which contributes to standardized clinical outputs across different cases.

Data management forms an essential component of digital dentistry workflows. Patient records, radiographic images, intraoral scans, and design files are stored in interconnected systems that allow seamless access and transfer between clinicians and dental laboratories. This digital ecosystem minimizes reliance on physical storage and enhances communication efficiency. Cloud-based platforms further extend accessibility, enabling collaboration between specialists in different geographic locations. This connectivity allows prosthodontists, orthodontists, and oral surgeons to coordinate treatment planning more effectively, particularly in complex rehabilitative cases that require multidisciplinary input.

Radiographic imaging technologies also contribute significantly to digital workflows. Cone-beam computed tomography provides volumetric imaging of maxillofacial structures, allowing three-dimensional assessment of bone density, anatomical landmarks, and pathological conditions. When combined with intraoral scan data, these imaging modalities create comprehensive digital patient models that support implant planning and guided surgery. Surgical templates produced from these integrated datasets assist clinicians in achieving accurate implant positioning by transferring virtual planning into clinical execution with greater predictability.

Orthodontic applications of digital workflows include aligner therapy design, digital cephalometric analysis, and treatment simulation. Software tools generate sequential tooth movement plans that guide the fabrication of aligner sets. This approach reduces reliance on traditional bracket systems in certain cases and provides patients with removable and visually discreet treatment options. Treatment progression can be monitored

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Received: 27-Feb-2026, Manuscript No DCR-26-31612; **Editor assigned:** 02-Mar-2026, PreQC DCR-26-31612(PQ); **Reviewed:** 16-Mar-2026, QC No DCR-26-31612; **Revised:** 23-Mar-2026, Manuscript No. DCR-26-31612 (R); **Published:** 30-Mar-2026, DOI: 10.35248/2161-1122.26.16.756

Citation: Lennox C (2026). Digital Dentistry Workflows in Modern Clinical Practice. J Dentistry. 16:756.

using periodic scans, allowing clinicians to compare outcomes with initial digital plans and make adjustments when necessary.

CONCLUSION

As digital systems continue to evolve, interoperability between different software platforms remains an important consideration. Standardization of file formats and communication protocols ensures compatibility across devices and institutions. Continued development in this area supports smoother integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence-assisted design and automated diagnostic systems, which may further refine clinical decision-making processes in the future