



# Dental VIP – Venture, Innovation & Partnering Summit 2026

## Conference Summary

[Dental VIP, a Cambridge Healthtech Institute Event](#)

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## Executive Overview

The 2026 [Dental Venture, Innovation and Partnering Summit](#) explored how dentistry is evolving at the intersection of technology, care delivery, education, and investment. Across sessions, speakers from clinical practice, DSOs, academia, venture capital, and industry focused less on disruption for its own sake and more on how to translate innovation into practical, scalable impact. The conversation consistently returned to aligning technology, business models, and clinical workflows to address real constraints around workforce, economics, and patient access.

### Most Frequently Covered Issues

- 1. Workforce constraints and shifting roles in the dental practice**  
Staff shortages, rising labor costs, and changing workforce expectations are driving increased reliance on automation and AI, particularly in administrative and operational functions.
- 2. Integration challenges across technology ecosystems**  
Fragmented systems and lack of interoperability limit the effectiveness of AI and digital tools, with growing emphasis on orchestration, standardization, and seamless workflow integration.
- 3. Translating AI and innovation into measurable outcomes**  
While AI adoption is accelerating, questions remain around implementation, trust, governance, and the ability to deliver clear improvements in efficiency, revenue, and patient care.
- 4. Economic pressures reshaping adoption and investment decisions**  
Rising costs, flat reimbursement, and constrained capital environments are forcing both practices and investors to prioritize solutions that directly impact profitability and operational performance.
- 5. Evolving models of care, education, and industry structure**  
The convergence of dental and medical care, growth of DSOs, and changing expectations for dental education are redefining how care is delivered, how clinicians are trained, and how organizations collaborate.

### Recurring Takeaways

- Innovation is being evaluated based on its ability to solve real operational and financial challenges, not just technological novelty.
- AI will augment, not replace, clinicians, with human oversight remaining essential in care delivery.
- Successful adoption depends on integration, implementation, and alignment across teams, not just the quality of the technology itself.
- Partnerships across industry, education, and practice models are critical to scaling innovation and expanding access to care.
- The future of dentistry will be shaped by a combination of clinical expertise, technological fluency, and leadership within a more connected healthcare ecosystem.



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## Fireside Chat: Convergence of Care: Medical & Dental Integration

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**Stephen Thorne**, Founder & CEO, PDS Health

Interviewed By: **Jeremy N. Krell, DMD, MBA**, Founder & Managing Partner, Revere Partners

The discussion explored the growing convergence between dental and medical care, with a focus on how emerging technologies and data integration are reshaping the role of dentistry within broader healthcare. The conversation emphasized a shift from isolated dental treatment toward a more connected, preventative model, where oral health is recognized as a critical component of overall systemic health. (00:00:14–00:02:25)

Thorne highlighted saliva as a foundational diagnostic medium, describing it as an underutilized but rapidly advancing tool for both oral and systemic health insights. He noted that point-of-care saliva testing is approaching mainstream adoption, with increasing industry investment and regulatory support. By providing measurable, real-time indicators such as bacterial activity and disease risk, these tools can significantly improve patient engagement, moving individuals from passive awareness to active participation in their care. (00:02:25–00:08:21)

The conversation also underscored the importance of delivering insights at the point of care rather than through delayed, lab-based reporting. While at-home and send-out testing models are expanding, Thorne emphasized that activation into care is most effective when tied directly to the clinician-patient relationship. Longitudinal data tracking was identified as a critical next step, enabling providers to monitor changes over time and communicate disease progression in a way that drives earlier intervention and more informed decision-making. (00:09:59–00:12:54)

Expanding beyond diagnostics, the speakers addressed the structural challenges of integrating dental and medical systems. Thorne described how unified health records and interoperable platforms enable clinicians to access comprehensive patient data, improving both clinical decision-making and care coordination. He also emphasized the need to move from a reactive model focused on repairing damage to a predictive and preventive approach, where dental professionals play a more active role in identifying systemic risk and guiding patients through a broader healthcare journey. (00:14:01–00:18:28)

### Key Takeaways

- Saliva-based diagnostics are emerging as a key tool for integrated care.
- Point-of-care insights are critical to driving patient activation.
- Longitudinal data enables earlier intervention and better outcomes.
- Convergence of dental and medical care depends on data integration and preventive models.

## Global Insights on Innovation in New & Emerging Markets

[Full Video Here](#)

**Andrea Albertini**, CEO Global Distribution & Technology, Henry Schein

The presentation explored the evolving role of trust in a rapidly advancing, technology-driven dental landscape. Framed against the acceleration of AI and digital tools, the speaker highlighted a growing tension between increased access to information and declining trust in institutions. While technology continues to expand capabilities across diagnostics, treatment planning, and operations, trust is emerging as a critical differentiator in how patients and providers navigate care decisions. (00:00:45–00:02:04)

Drawing on industry and consumer trends, the speaker emphasized that trust is increasingly shifting away from large institutions toward local, relationship-driven environments. In dentistry, this dynamic is particularly pronounced, as care is inherently personal, physical, and emotionally charged. Patients rely not on technology itself, but on practitioners who use it effectively, reinforcing the idea that human credibility remains central even as digital tools become more pervasive. (00:02:17–00:06:55)

The discussion also addressed the paradox created by AI adoption. While automation improves efficiency and expands access to information, it simultaneously raises expectations around transparency and authenticity. As patients become more informed and more skeptical, providers must balance technological capabilities with clear communication and accountability. Technology can enhance understanding, particularly in areas such as treatment visualization and diagnosis, but it is the clinician’s ability to contextualize and communicate that ultimately builds trust. (00:08:40–00:10:49)

From an industry perspective, the speaker positioned manufacturers and technology partners as stewards of trust, responsible not only for delivering innovation but for enabling meaningful adoption. This includes supporting practices in selecting appropriate technologies, driving measurable outcomes, and maintaining long-term relationships built on reliability and transparency. Across both clinical and commercial contexts, the message was consistent: as technology becomes more accessible and standardized, differentiation will increasingly depend on the ability to build and sustain trust through everyday interactions. (00:11:08–00:13:43)

### **Key Takeaways**

- Trust is becoming a primary differentiator in a technology-driven landscape.
- Patients trust practitioners, not technology alone.
- AI increases expectations for transparency and communication.
- Long-term success depends on consistent, trust-based relationships.



## The Impact of Innovation on the State of the Dental Industry

[Full Video Here](#)

**Brian Colao**, Director, Dykema Dental Service Organizations Industry Group

The presentation examined the current state of the dental industry through the lens of recent market disruption and rapid technological advancement. The speaker framed the last five years as an unprecedented period shaped by pandemic shutdowns, workforce shortages, inflation, and rising interest rates, all of which have created an “unnatural” operating environment for dental practices. Against this backdrop, innovation is no longer optional, but must be directly tied to solving real economic and operational challenges facing the industry. (00:01:55–00:03:17)

Central to the discussion was the idea that technology must deliver measurable business impact rather than serve as a “shiny object.” Solutions that fail to address core pressures such as labor shortages, rising costs, and flat reimbursement rates are unlikely to gain traction with sophisticated buyers, including DSOs and large group practices. The speaker emphasized that successful technologies must contribute to same-store growth by either increasing patient volume, improving productivity with existing patients, or sustainably reducing operating costs. (00:07:13–00:10:08)

The presentation also highlighted broader structural shifts within the dental market, including a slowdown in M&A activity and increased scrutiny from investors. With capital no longer flowing as freely into the sector, organizations must now demonstrate strong fundamentals and clear differentiation to attract investment. Building a “premium asset” requires not only high-quality clinical care and culture, but also effective use of technology to drive operational efficiency, revenue growth, and long-term enterprise value. (00:10:20–00:13:01)

Finally, the speaker addressed the gap between innovation and adoption, noting that many promising technologies fail to scale due to poor implementation, lack of integration, and insufficient organizational alignment. Successful deployment requires coordinated effort across leadership, clinicians, staff, and vendor partners, along with standardized systems and clear execution plans. In a market defined by rapid change and increasing competition, those organizations that can effectively adopt and operationalize technology will be best positioned to adapt and grow. (00:21:03–00:24:56)

### **Key Takeaways**

- Technology must solve real economic and operational challenges.
- Same-store growth depends on productivity, patient volume, or cost reduction.
- Market pressures are driving increased scrutiny and demand for premium assets.
- Successful innovation requires strong implementation and organizational alignment.

## Exploring the Intersection of AI, Robotics & Data-Driven Care

[Full Video Here](#)

### Panelists:

**Dr. Shervin Molayem**, Periodontist, Co-Founder, Trust AI (Moderator); **Kathryn Alderman**, Founder & CEO, Intelligent Care Alliance; **Andreas Augat**, Founder, dentaiware; **Kianor Shah, DMD, MBA**, Co-Founder, Healthcare Intelligence Board.

The panel explored how AI, robotics, and data-driven tools are reshaping roles, workflows, and decision-making within dental practices. The discussion opened with the expectation that administrative functions, particularly at the front desk, will be increasingly automated, allowing staff to shift toward patient-facing responsibilities. While clinical roles remain protected due to licensing and regulatory requirements, panelists agreed that most positions will evolve significantly as AI becomes more embedded in daily operations. (00:01:50–00:02:36)

A central theme was the importance of integration and orchestration across multiple AI solutions. Panelists noted that while individual tools can drive incremental gains, the lack of interoperability limits broader impact on revenue and efficiency. The concept of “AI orchestration” was introduced as a future state in which multiple AI agents operate cohesively within a unified system, enabling more seamless workflows and higher adoption rates across practices. (00:03:45–00:05:21)

The discussion also addressed misconceptions around “agentic AI” and autonomy in healthcare settings. Panelists emphasized that fully autonomous decision-making is unlikely in dentistry due to regulatory, legal, and ethical constraints. Instead, the prevailing model will center on “human-in-the-loop” systems, where AI augments decision-making while clinicians retain ultimate responsibility. This balance is particularly critical in patient-facing scenarios, while greater automation may be feasible in administrative and back-office functions. (00:09:26–00:12:17)

Governance and standardization emerged as key challenges, with ongoing efforts to establish frameworks that ensure safety, interoperability, and accountability across AI applications. Panelists highlighted the need for global collaboration on standards, as well as clearer delineation of liability when AI systems are involved in care delivery. As adoption accelerates, these structures will play a critical role in enabling trust and long-term scalability. (00:21:13–00:22:21)

### Key Takeaways

- Administrative roles will shift as AI automates routine tasks.
- Integration and orchestration are critical to scaling AI impact.
- Human oversight remains essential in clinical decision-making.
- Governance and standards are needed to support safe AI adoption.

## Voices of Influence on the Future of Dentistry: “Deans vs DSOs”

[Full Video Here](#)

### Panelists:

**David A. Kochman**, SVP, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Henry Schein (Moderator); **Arwinder Judge**, DDS, Chief Clinical Officer, Aspen Dental; **Andrew Smith**, CEO, The Assoc. of Dental Support Organizations; **Nader Nadershashi**, DDS, MBA, EdD, SVP, Education and Professional Affairs, American Dental Association; **Carol Anne Murdoch-Kinch**, DDS, PhD, Dean, Indiana University School of Dentistry; **Ali Shazib**, DMD, Dean, Workman School of Dental Medicine, Highpoint University

The panel examined the evolving relationship between dental education and dental support organizations (DSOs), highlighting how both sectors are adapting to rapid industry change. Discussions focused on preparing future dentists for a profession shaped by consolidation, technology, and shifting patient expectations. While dental schools remain focused on graduating clinically competent practitioners, panelists acknowledged pressure to expand training to include business, leadership, and technology skills. (00:02:54–00:04:51)

Academic leaders emphasized the challenge of balancing clinical rigor with the need to evolve curricula in response to market demands. Newer models are incorporating real-world practice exposure earlier, including integration with practice networks and broader healthcare environments. This reflects a recognition that future dentists may pursue more diverse career paths, including roles as clinicians, entrepreneurs, and healthcare leaders. (00:05:45–00:06:57)

From the DSO perspective, panelists highlighted their role in expanding access to care, particularly in underserved and rural markets, while supporting new graduates who may lack business training or seek structured career pathways. DSOs offer scalability, operational support, and access to technology, though questions remain around perception, autonomy, and long-term impact. There was general agreement that multiple practice models will continue to coexist. (00:10:20–00:14:04)

The conversation shifted toward collaboration, with panelists identifying opportunities for stronger alignment between education and practice, including clinical rotations within DSOs, shared curriculum development, and improved feedback loops. As workforce shortages and burnout persist, coordinated efforts across academia, professional organizations, and practice models will be essential. (00:22:19–00:27:51)

### Key Takeaways

- Dental education must balance clinical rigor with evolving industry demands.
- DSOs play a growing role in access to care and early career development.
- Multiple practice models will coexist to meet diverse needs.
- Greater collaboration is needed to align education, workforce, and practice realities.



## Funding the Future — Dental Venture Capital in 2026

[Full Video Here](#)

### Panelists:

**Eva Allan**, Innovation Strategist & Fund Advisor (Moderator); **Shawn Cousins**, Investment Manager, PDS Health; **Stephen Socolof**, Managing Partner, Tech Council Ventures; **Dana Sun**, Partner, Equitage Ventures; **Jeremy N. Krell, DMD, MBA**, Founder & Managing Partner, Revere Partners

The panel explored the role of venture capital in shaping innovation within the dental industry, emphasizing that access to capital remains a primary driver of technological advancement. Panelists described a range of investment strategies, from specialized dental-focused funds to broader healthcare and generalist investors, with increasing interest in areas such as practice software, fintech, diagnostics, and technologies supporting the oral-systemic health connection. (00:01:03–00:02:20)

A key theme was the evolving composition of capital sources and investor expectations. Limited partners now include a mix of clinicians, corporate strategics, health systems, and institutional investors, each bringing different objectives beyond financial return. In many cases, value creation extends beyond capital deployment to include strategic partnerships, commercial validation, and access to distribution channels. This shift reflects a more ecosystem-driven approach to investing, where alignment between investors and operators plays a critical role in long-term success. (00:05:27–00:10:19)

Panelists also highlighted the expanding opportunity set for dental innovation, particularly as technologies increasingly intersect with broader healthcare applications. Solutions originally designed for dental use are now being evaluated for relevance across areas such as chronic disease management, aging populations, and medical-dental integration. This broader applicability is attracting interest from non-dental investors and positioning oral health as a more significant component of the overall healthcare landscape. (00:16:52–00:17:59)

The discussion addressed current fundraising challenges and pathways for early-stage companies, noting that recent market conditions have made capital more difficult to access, particularly for first-time and underrepresented founders. However, emerging funding mechanisms, including accelerators, angel networks, and non-dilutive grants, are helping to bridge early-stage gaps. Investors emphasized that beyond capital, successful founders must demonstrate clear problem understanding, early market validation, and consistent traction to attract institutional funding. (00:20:12–00:24:49)

### Key Takeaways

- Capital availability remains a primary driver of dental innovation.
- Investors increasingly provide strategic value beyond funding.
- Dental technologies are expanding into broader healthcare applications.
- Early-stage success depends on validation, traction, and ecosystem support.

## Dental Disruptors Panel

[Full Video Here](#)

### Panelists:

**Paul Feuerstein, DMD**, Editor in Chief, Dentistry Today (Moderator); **John Cox**, Chief Growth Officer, SprintRay; **Joe Lynch**, Head of Go to Market, Dandy; **Alon Mozes, PhD**, CEO & Co-Founder, Neocis; **Ophir Tanz**, CEO, Pearl

The panel brought together leaders across robotics, AI, 3D printing, and lab services to explore how innovation is reshaping dental workflows. Framing the discussion around meaningful disruption, the moderator emphasized that successful technologies must reduce overhead, improve patient experience, and increase practice revenue, rather than simply introducing new complexity. (00:00:00–00:00:56)

Moses described how robotic-assisted implant technology emerged from orthopedic surgery, where similar challenges around precision and workflow had already been addressed. He highlighted the importance of usability, noting that innovations such as mechanical tracking systems were developed to eliminate line-of-sight limitations and reduce procedural friction. The goal is to improve accuracy and consistency while lowering clinician stress without introducing additional operational burden. (00:01:40–00:04:33)

Tanz positioned AI as a foundational layer for unlocking value from the large volume of imaging and operational data already present in dental practices. Beyond diagnostic support, he emphasized AI's role in improving patient communication, enabling clearer visualization of conditions and more productive chairside conversations. While AI can surface insights and improve consistency, he reinforced that it remains an assistive tool, with clinical judgment and accountability firmly in the hands of the practitioner. (00:06:51–00:12:48)

Cox and Lynch focused on workflow transformation across both chairside care and lab integration. Cox described a shift toward delivering more treatments in a single visit through tightly integrated hardware, software, materials, and AI, while still maintaining strong connections to lab partners. Lynch outlined a vertically integrated model that combines digital scanning, AI-driven quality control, and automated manufacturing, with an emphasis on clinician training and real-time support to drive adoption and consistency. Across both perspectives, the discussion underscored that innovation is most effective when it simplifies workflows, reduces variability, and expands access to care. (00:13:19–00:20:29)

### Key Takeaways

- Successful innovation must improve efficiency, experience, and revenue simultaneously.
- Usability and workflow integration are critical to adoption of advanced technologies.
- AI enhances diagnosis and communication but remains an assistive tool.
- End-to-end workflow integration is reshaping both chairside care and lab relationships.



## Industry Perspectives on Strategic Partnerships

[Full Video Here](#)

### Panelists:

**Brett H. Kessler, DDS**, Past President, American Dental Assoc. (Moderator); **Ryan Hungate**, Chief Clinical & Strategy Officer, Henry Schein; **Aman Kaur**, Founder & President, Women in DSO; **Eric Shirley**, CEO, VistaApex Solutions; **Rich Rosato**, President, American Dental Association; **Heather Trombley**, President & COO, DENTALEZ; **Jason Woods**, VP of Strategy & Innovation, Delta Dental of Minnesota

The panel explored the growing importance of strategic partnerships across the dental ecosystem, emphasizing alignment around shared goals as the foundation for success. Panelists noted that effective partnerships must balance both mission-driven objectives and clear business outcomes, particularly in an environment shaped by regulatory pressure, workforce challenges, and evolving care delivery models. As external pressures increase, collaboration across organizations is becoming essential to advancing both professional advocacy and patient care. (00:05:00–00:07:26)

Across industry perspectives, partnerships were described as increasingly critical to delivering integrated solutions rather than standalone products. Manufacturers, technology providers, and service organizations are working together to combine capabilities, streamline workflows, and improve operational efficiency for practices. This shift reflects a broader move toward outcome-based models, where value is defined not by tools alone, but by their ability to solve real clinical, financial, and operational challenges. (00:12:17–00:15:22)

Panelists also highlighted the importance of clearly defined expectations and alignment at the outset of any partnership. Successful collaborations require transparency around goals, capabilities, and limitations, as well as a deep understanding of the specific needs of each practice or organization. Whether working with DSOs, private practices, or emerging technologies, tailoring solutions and maintaining open communication were identified as key drivers of long-term success. (00:24:52–00:26:16)

Looking ahead, the discussion pointed to a future where speed, agility, and adaptability will define the most effective partnerships. As technology accelerates and care models evolve, organizations must focus on their core strengths while leveraging partners to fill capability gaps. Ultimately, the most successful partnerships will be those that remain centered on improving patient outcomes while enabling clinicians to focus more fully on care delivery. (00:34:02–00:40:53)

### Key Takeaways

- Successful partnerships require alignment on both mission and business outcomes.
- Integrated solutions are replacing standalone products across the ecosystem.
- Clear expectations and communication are critical to long-term success.
- Future partnerships will prioritize agility, specialization, and patient outcomes.