Q. A sales person has suggested that I add video cameras in my dental office. Is this a good idea?

A. Every dentist is aware that pre-operative and post-operative photos are an essential component of risk management. Such photographs document the condition of the oral cavity when the patient first presents to the office, and the condition or post treatment status after treatment is completed, or a component of treatment has been completed. These images can also be helpful to patients in understanding their oral condition, such as documenting a comparative representation from an esthetic or functional perspective.

The question has often arisen as to the potential use of video cameras in the office. If a picture is worth a thousand words, perhaps a video is worth much more. We see video recordings on television almost every day, used for a broad spectrum of purposes, from identifying criminal suspects to alerting the public about a missing child or kidnap victim. Videos are often used in revealing safety hazards on roads or the causes of serious automobile accidents.

From a dental-legal risk management perspective, there are many cases that could have been avoided, or quickly resolved, had a video recording existed. Such actual incidents include patient assaults on dental staff, assaults by dental staff on patients or other staff persons, employee theft, drug diversion, as well as criminal trespass. But the use of video recordings of any patient encounter should be treated as privileged and confidential, similar to any other protected patient information, unless disclosure is required by lawful process.

In today's society, video recordings can be invaluable evidence of what did or did not occur, as well as the person or persons responsible. The modern dental office should consider the use of such technology as a potential adjunct to the complete risk management portfolio.