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Dynamic Navigation System For Implant Placement: A Review Article

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Abstract

Accurate implant placement is essential for achieving functional, esthetic and long-term clinical success in implant dentistry. Traditionally, freehand surgery and static surgical guides have been employed to enhance precision. Recently, **dynamic navigation systems (DNS)**, adapted from medical neurosurgical navigation, have gained attention in implantology. This review summarizes the principles, workflow, advantages, limitations and current evidence on the clinical performance of dynamic navigation systems for dental implant placement.[1-3]

Introduction

Dental implants are a well-established and predictable option for the replacement of missing teeth, with their long-term success largely determined by the accuracy of implant placement relative to anatomical landmarks and prosthetic requirements. Inaccurate positioning may result in complications such as nerve injury, sinus membrane perforation, cortical plate damage, or compromised esthetic outcomes.

The primary goal of dynamic navigation is not only to achieve precise implant placement but also to enhance overall clinical outcomes. Improved results are obtained by positioning implants in an ideal location, enabling the fabrication of functional and efficient prostheses, achieving superior esthetics and promoting long-term peri-implant health.

Although static surgical guides have been widely employed to improve precision, they present notable drawbacks, including the lack of intraoperative flexibility, additional cost and the necessity of guide fabrication. In contrast, **dynamic navigation (DN) systems** offer a computer-assisted, real-time approach that enables greater control and adaptability during surgery.

Originally developed for use in other medical specialties, DN has recently been adapted to implant dentistry, where it has shown promising results in enhancing surgical accuracy. This technology allows clinicians to evaluate the patient, acquire imaging, plan the implant virtually and carry out the procedure within the same appointment overcoming the delays associated with static guides. The DN workflow generally includes: (1) cone-beam computed tomography (CBCT) with fiducial markers, (2) virtual implant planning, (3) calibration of the navigation system and (4) guided implant placement based on a real-time three-dimensional (3D) display. By integrating these steps, DN provides significant advantages in terms of precision, accuracy and intraoperative flexibility, making it an important advancement in modern implant surgery.

Dynamic navigation technology enables surgeons to operate in real time by visualizing and controlling the orientation of the implant drill within the bone, guided by preoperative CBCT images displayed on a screen. This innovative system has been widely applied across several medical specialties, including neurosurgery, orthopedics, surgical oncology, vascular surgery, otolaryngology and plastic surgery. In the field of dentistry, dynamic navigation has found applications in a variety of oral surgical procedures such as midface fracture management, jaw resections, orthognathic surgery and the treatment of temporomandibular joint disorders.[4,5,6]

Different methods for placing implants

Freehand Approach

The freehand technique remains the most widely used method for implant placement. In this conventional approach, the accuracy of implant positioning relies solely on the surgeon's skill, experience and dexterity. Placement is guided using adjacent and opposing teeth as reference points, while calibrated probes are employed to assess the available bone dimensions, including height and width.[7]

Static Guided Approach

The static guided technique employs various types of surgical templates to assist in implant placement. Depending on the material, these stents may differ in accuracy and practicality. A clear vacuum-formed stent is simple to fabricate but often too flexible, leading to reduced accuracy during implant insertion. Chemical-cure acrylic stents with lead strips function primarily as diagnostic tools rather than surgical guides. Self-cure acrylic stents with metal sleeves and disks provide the highest accuracy, but they are costly and rigid, while self-cure acrylic stents with gutta-percha filled channels offer less precision compared to those with metal sleeves.

Surgical templates can also be classified based on their support: **tooth-supported, bone-supported, or mucosa supported**. These guides are designed to control the angulation and position of implants within the bone. Traditional plaster-based templates help maintain implant position but do not account for underlying bone morphology. In contrast, computer-generated surgical guides, designed using CBCT and CAD technology, consider bone anatomy. Such stents, typically fabricated with metal tubes, are used in combination with coordinated surgical systems and instruments to achieve greater precision in implant placement.[8]

Dynamic Navigated Surgery

The most recent advancement in implant placement is **dynamic navigated surgery**, which enables implants to be positioned virtually and in real time. Using CBCT-derived images displayed on a monitor, the surgeon can visualize the exact location of the implant during the procedure and adjust placement dynamically. This technology provides continuous feedback on implant depth, angulation and position, thereby enhancing surgical precision. To evaluate its true clinical significance, dynamic navigation is often compared with freehand and static guided approaches, allowing clinicians to make informed, evidence-based decisions regarding its use in implant dentistry.[9,10]

Reliability and Advantages of Dynamic Navigation

One of the greatest advantages of dynamic navigation is that the accuracy of implant placement can be continuously monitored throughout the procedure unlike freehand or static-guided approaches, where errors may go unnoticed until completion. Literature has highlighted the potential inaccuracies of static guides, as any error in the splint can compromise the entire surgical process.

Another key benefit of dynamic navigation is that much of the procedure can be performed while the patient observes the monitor. This is particularly valuable in aesthetically sensitive regions, such as the maxillary anterior zone, where the system allows precise evaluation of bucco-lingual, mesio-distal and apico-coronal dimensions. By placing implants according to both aesthetic and prosthetic planning, dynamic navigation can help achieve favourable clinical and esthetic outcomes.[11]

Additionally, considerations of physiological tongue position are important. In the resting state, the tongue typically rests against the anterior portion of the hard palate, playing a crucial role in speech and sleep physiology. Encroachment into this space can reduce functional tongue volume, potentially causing issues such as tongue thrusting, open bite, tooth rotations and trauma to the lateral borders.

The risk of encroaching on the functional tongue space is higher with freehand surgery or inadequately fabricated static guides. This limitation is addressed by dynamic navigation, which allows for real-time intraoperative adjustments to implant positioning. Additionally, dynamic navigation can help reduce occupational hazards such as back pain, which is common among dentists and enables implant placement even in patients with restricted mouth opening with minimal difficulty. Procedures can be planned and completed on the same day, eliminating delays associated with the fabrication of static surgical guides.

The visibility of the drill in real time also facilitates **flapless implant surgery**, as the precise position within the bone is always monitored. Several studies have reported that dynamic navigation contributes to a significant reduction in overall surgical time, improving both efficiency and patient comfort.[12]

Disadvantages of Dynamic Navigation

The primary drawback of dynamic navigation is the high cost of the system and its associated accessories. Even experienced implant surgeons require time to fully grasp the technique, as it involves a significant learning curve. Additionally, edentulous patients often need extra surgical exposure for fiducial placement. A commonly observed complication with this method is the loss of connection between the sensor and the camera. Therefore, the decision to use dynamic navigation over static navigation should be carefully justified.[13]

Principles of a Dynamic Navigation System

Three-Dimensional Visualization

The system must reconstruct a 3D model of the anatomy (from CBCT, CT, MRI etc.), enabling views in multiple planes (axial, sagittal, coronal, cross-sectional) and also virtual 3D renderings. This allows planning in three dimensions and helps in understanding depth, orientation, and spatial relationships.

Preoperative Planning/Virtual Design

Before any procedure, the clinician must plan the target: where things need to go (e.g. implant position, trajectory), which structures to avoid, angles, depths etc. This plan is established in virtual space (on imaging). It forms the baseline from which intraoperative guidance will be measured. [14,15]

Motion Tracking/Real-Time Feedback

One of the key principles: instruments and patient anatomy must be tracked in real time so that the system can map the virtual plan onto the actual intraoperative situation. This involves sensors (optical, infrared), trackers attached to the patient or instrument, etc. The system gives real-time feedback (visual, auditory, sometimes haptic) guiding the operator.

Registration/Spatial Calibration

To overlay the virtual plan with the real anatomy, the system must perform registration. That means matching points / fiducials / surface morphology between patient and imaging. Also calibrating the instrument so that its tip, orientation etc. are correctly known in relation to the patient. Accurate calibration and registration are foundational to ensure that what the system shows corresponds precisely to what is happening. [15]

Accuracy, Precision, and Error Minimization

DNS must maintain high accuracy (both positional - how far off in mm; and angular deviation). There should be awareness of sources of error: imaging voxel size, tracker resolution, registration errors, instrument calibration, movement of patient, signal delay, etc. Designs/principles aim to minimize all these. Also safety margins (e.g. maintain safe distance from vital structures) are set.

Adaptability / Dynamic Adjustments during Procedure

Unlike static guides, dynamic systems allow changes during surgery/removal of static constraints. For example, if the patient moves, or intraoperative findings differ somewhat from preoperative plan, the system must allow for real-time adjustment.

User Interface & Feedback Mechanisms

The clinician must be able to see (on screen) where the instrument is relative to the planned path, get feedback as to depth, angle, direction etc. The interface needs to be intuitive, low latency, clearly visible. Also alerts or warnings if the drill or instrument is deviating outside acceptable bounds. [15]

Workflow Integration and Efficiency

The system should integrate smoothly into clinical workflow: data acquisition, planning, registration, calibration, operation, verification, post-operative evaluation. Time taken, ease of use, learning curve, must be reasonable so that users adopt the system.

Safety and Risk Management

Because navigation involves critical anatomy, risk of injury is present. Systems must include safety features: ability to abort / override guidance; alerts on critical proximity; redundant checks; conservative safety margins; imaging quality control; stable tracking (avoid signal dropouts).[15]

Validation and Learning Curve

Validation of the system through in vitro / clinical studies to know how well it performs (i.e. measure deviations, outcomes). Also, users need training; there is a learning curve, and principles must accommodate this (e.g. provide guidance, practice, possibly simulation).

Applications

Dynamic navigation, a real-time, computer-assisted guidance technology that tracks the position of surgical instruments relative to a patient's 3-D radiographic plan has rapidly moved from proof-of-concept to routine clinical use in several dental specialties. Unlike static surgical guides, DN provides live feedback and allows intraoperative adjustments while preserving accuracy, making it well suited for complex and minimally invasive procedures. [15]

Implantology (Guided implant placement)

The principal and best-documented application of DN in dentistry is implant placement. DN permits accurate transfer of virtual implant plans to the surgical field while retaining the surgeon's freedom to change angulation, depth, or position intraoperatively. Clinical studies and randomized prospective trials show that DN achieves accuracy comparable to static guides and superior to freehand placement, with particular advantages in posterior and molar sites where angulation control is critical. DN also reduces the need for large flaps and enables more predictable flapless approaches, improving soft-tissue outcomes.

Endodontics (Guided access and microsurgery)

DN is increasingly used in endodontics for conservative access cavity preparation, locating calcified or obliterated canals, guided retreatment and endodontic microsurgery (apical surgery). By preplanning the ideal access path on CBCT and tracking the bur in real time, clinicians can conserve tooth structure while avoiding iatrogenic errors. Several cadaveric and clinical series report improved canal localization time, high accuracy of trephination/osteotomy windows and favourable radiographic outcomes for guided microsurgery. [15]

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (Complex osteotomies & recon)

DN assists in osteotomies, removal of impacted teeth in challenging positions and in complex reconstructive workflows where anatomy is altered by disease or trauma. The technology is particularly helpful when bone landmarks are distorted or when intraoperative adaptation is necessary (e.g., tumor margins, anatomic variation). Systematic reviews note a growing number of oral surgery indications beyond implantology.

Prosthodontics & Immediate Restoration Workflows

DN streamlines immediate implant workflows by ensuring implant position fidelity required for prefabricated provisional restorations. Accurate implant positioning reduces chairside adjustment and improves immediate loading predictability, which is especially valuable in single-tooth anterior cases where esthetics depend on exact implant placement.

Training, Education and Operator-Independence

DN reduces the dependence of outcomes on surgeon experience for many tasks: novice operators using DN can approach the accuracy of experienced clinicians, improving training efficiency and patient safety during the learning curve. It also provides objective intraoperative feedback that is useful for teaching and quality assurance. [16,17]

Future Perspectives

Dynamic navigation (DN) has matured from a promising proof-of-concept into a clinically useful tool that improves implant positioning accuracy and intraoperative flexibility compared with freehand techniques. Future progress will be driven by technical refinement, tighter integration with other digital workflows, higher-quality clinical evidence and solutions that reduce cost and complexity for everyday practice.

Hybridisation with Robotics and Automation

DN provides real-time guidance, while robotic systems offer mechanical stability and repeatability; combining the two (either as DN-assisted robots or semi-autonomous guidance) promises higher placement precision and reduced operator dependence for complex and full-arch cases. Early comparative work suggests robots can outperform DN in stability/accuracy in some settings and hybrid systems are a logical next step.

Augmented/Mixed Reality (AR/MR) and Heads-Up Workflows

Projecting navigation overlays into AR/MR headsets (or through heads-up displays) will let surgeons keep hands and sight on the field while receiving guidance, shortening cognitive load and potentially improving ergonomics and speed. Proof-of-concept clinical feasibility studies of MR-assisted DN have already been reported, indicating this is an attainable short-term development. [17,18]

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Planning, Error-Detection and Automation

AI models can accelerate preoperative planning (e.g., automated optimal implant axis and size suggestions), detect registration drift in real time and flag risky trajectories before bone preparation. Integration of AI decision-support into DN will both speed workflows and reduce human error, but will require clinical validation and regulatory approvals.

Better Tracker Fixation, Robustness and Miniaturisation

Current limitations arise from patient- or tracker-movement and bulky tracker designs; improving fixation methods (oral appliances, bone-anchored or intraoral mounts) and miniaturising sensors will reduce registration errors, increasing clinical reliability even in partially edentulous and edentulous arches. Recent work specifically testing oral-appliance fixation shows promising gains in accuracy.[19,20]

Full Digital Ecosystem: Intraoral Scans, CAD/CAM and Immediate Prosthetics

Tighter, seamless data transfer between CBCT, intraoral scans, DN software and CAD/CAM prosthesis milling will allow true “top-down” treatments where implants are placed to fit digitally prefabricated restorations immediately enabling efficient immediate loading workflows for single and full-arch cases. Early clinical series already demonstrate feasibility for complete-arch, digitally driven workflows.

Training, Competence Verification and Tele mentoring

DN lowers the technical threshold for precise implant placement and can be a powerful training tool (simulator modes, recorded procedures). Future DN platforms will likely include competency metrics, objective feedback loops for trainees and secure telementoring so experts can supervise remotely especially valuable in training centres and underserved areas. Educational studies show DN is useful for novice training but underscore the remaining learning curve. [21,22]

Standardisation, Multi-Centre Clinical Trials and Long-Term Outcomes

Although many studies report improved positional accuracy versus freehand, long-term data linking DN use to prosthetic success, biological outcomes, complication rates and cost-effectiveness remain limited. Large multicentre randomized trials and standardized outcome reporting (including workflow time and economics) will be essential for guideline adoption and reimbursement decisions. Recent systematic reviews have called for higher-quality clinical evidence.

Cost Reduction, Workflow Simplification and Accessibility

Wider adoption depends on reducing hardware/software cost, simplifying setup (shorter registration steps, fewer fiducials) and ensuring compatibility across vendors. Cloud-based navigation, subscription models and modular hardware could lower entry barriers, but must be balanced against data privacy/regulatory requirements.[23]

Regulatory, Cybersecurity and Medico-Legal Considerations

As DN systems incorporate AI, remote connectivity and automated features, regulatory approval pathways and cybersecurity protections will be critical. Clear documentation of responsibility (surgeon vs software/robot) and standardized incident reporting will be needed to manage medico-legal risk as automation increases.

Personalized, Patient-Centric Navigation and Outcome Prediction

Future DN ecosystems may integrate patient-specific risk models (bone quality, systemic factors) and prosthetic predictors so that navigation not only guides drilling but recommends tailored safety margins, implant designs and loading protocols moving toward truly personalized implant therapy. [23]

Conclusion

Dynamic navigation systems represent a significant advancement in implantology, providing real-time, accurate and flexible guidance for implant placement. Although the technology demands a learning curve and financial investment, its potential to enhance surgical precision and patient outcomes makes it an important tool for modern implant dentistry. Future improvements in usability and afford ability are expected to expand its adoption in clinical practice. Dynamic navigation systems have emerged as a significant advancement in implant dentistry, offering enhanced accuracy, predictability and real-time surgical guidance compared to conventional freehand techniques. By integrating preoperative imaging with intraoperative tracking, these systems reduce the risk of complications, optimize implant positioning and improve long-term prosthetic outcomes. Despite challenges such as high cost, a steep learning curve and occasional technical limitations, continuous innovations are addressing these drawbacks and expanding clinical applications. As digital dentistry continues to evolve, dynamic navigation is likely to become an integral tool in implantology, bridging the gap between precision and efficiency, while ultimately improving patient care. Future research and clinical trials with long-term follow-up are essential to further validate its benefits and to establish standardized protocols for routine practice.[24,25]

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