

I don't know that there are real ghosts and goblins, but there are always more trick-or-treaters than neighborhood kids.

-Robert Brault

Early Cavity Detection or Waiting Until it Hurts ... What Would You Do?

I have always been an early adopter of technology in my office. My philosophy is if there is a new technique or piece of technology that can help me provide a higher level of care for my patients, then it is my duty to embrace it. Dentistry has changed drastically in the past decade, and all for the good. We are able to provide a higher level of excellence for our patients which results in more conservative and painless treatment. One of these technological breakthroughs, called the "Diagnodent," uses a laser to detect signs of decay (cavities) earlier than many other investigative techniques. If your dentist could find a cavity earlier, and address it before it becomes painful and requires more expensive treatment, wouldn't you want that? This month's column will show you the advantages of this technology and the several benefits of the Diagnodent, not only for the patient, but for the dental practitioner as well.



Dentally Speaking by Jeffrey S. Haddad

Most tooth decay begins in the tiny cracks and grooves of your tooth's surface. By the time the cavities are noticed, it is often because there is a larger problem, and the cavity itself was never seen or felt by the patient. With the widespread

use of fluoride, many of these cavities never make it to the tooth's surface, and instead begin eating away at the tooth from the inside out. Many times throughout my career, I have had the unfortunate situation where a patient, especially a child, has a cavity that is significantly deeper than we suspected. Dentists have traditionally relied on the "dental explorer," a metal instrument that would stick in the grooves of decayed teeth. Unfortunately, by the time the dentist found "a stick," the decay below the surface could have severely spread below the surface involving the nerve of the tooth. If that is the case, a root canal is then necessary to properly restore the tooth.

How does the Diagnodent work?

It utilizes laser light fluorescence to determine how hard the different parts of a tooth are. Teeth that are healthy will display little fluorescence, but those that are softer (due to decay) will show higher readings. Each reading will give an accurate measurement that will be recorded in the patient's chart.

Recently, a Fox news story attempted to discredit these laser fluorescence decay detectors saying "they are not necessary." They tried to show that visual inspection and probing was just as accurate, which has been shown to be completely untrue. The ADA did respond to the story stating that this was not their stance on this technology, and that it does play an important role in proper dental diagnoses. I could not have disagreed more with the Fox News story. As a dentist that has utilized laser cavity detection, I know that it gives us more data than we ever had and is more accurate than our traditional methods. In my opinion, this technology



is invaluable for a proper diagnosis and conservative treatment for my patients.

What is so beneficial about Diagnodent?

•It is 90 percent Accurate. Inspection with explorer (metal probe) is only 58 percent accurate. X-rays are only 67 percent accurate.

•It identifies tooth decay earlier than other techniques. This allows the dentist to treat the tooth sooner, leading to a more conservative restoration and avoiding possible root canals or more aggressive treatment. Many times, no anesthetic is necessary due to the small size of the cavity.

Actual measurements for future reference.

When a reading is found on a tooth, it is recorded in the patient's chart. In six months, a new reading is taken. If it has progressed, then it is proven that the decay is active. If the measurement is unchanged, the tooth can be accurately monitored. In the past, this was essentially a guess made by the dentist trying to compare the assessment after six months had passed.

If you have the choice of detecting a disease in your mouth, before it actually becomes a problem, would you like that information? Having technology that gives me, and my patients, this data has allowed me to provide the high level of dentistry that my practice is based on.

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