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COLUMN

New advances are taking the fear out of dentistry

Do you look forward to going to the dentist? For the majority of people reading this, my guess is a resounding no. In fact, I would like to confess something to you: I am one of those people. For those of you who have had or needed substantial dental work in the past, you may be familiar with this dreaded feeling. Research shows that over 30% of the population avoids going to the dentist due to fear. On many lists of people's fears, the top three fears are: 1. public speaking 2. dental fear 3. fear of death. Dental fear comes before fear of death! Dental phobias can be a result of a multitude of things, including previous traumatic experiences, discomfort while having a dental procedure, or even noises and tastes associated with dental procedures. The good news is that dentistry has changed so drastically in the past decade that many of your fears and discomforts can be completely alleviated. In fact, many people are able to have all of their dentistry completed in as little as two to three visits, and under minimal sedation if they prefer, where they barely remember the procedure at all.



Dentally Speaking

by Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S.

2. Fear of The Shot: Just the fear and anxiety anticipating the shot, can keep people away from the dentist. One traumatic dental experience in someone's life can cause a lifetime of fear and anxiety.

Luckily, many improvements have been made to avoid the pain of a dental injection. The topical anesthetics we use in our office are the some of the strongest topical ointments used in medicine. Not only do they work amazingly, but we use them on EVERY patient and allow them to start working before we perform our injection. The majority of our patients actually comment about how much our dental injections are painless.

3. Fear of Gagging: A recent study concluded that patients who have a higher frequency of gagging problems during a dental visit are more likely to experience higher levels of dental care-related fear, as well as more overall negativity towards dental professionals. Furthermore, a sensitive gag reflex may be a sign of an airway problem like snoring or sleep apnea, which are both very serious health issues. If we suspect a possible airway concern, we can utilize a home sleep monitor that can identify a snoring or sleep breathing disorder. For our gagging patients, we have many solutions that can put them at ease. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) is an excellent remedy for patients who have a bad gag reflex. Not only does it relax these patients and lower their anxiety, it also helps them concentrate on breathing through their nose which is often difficult for gaggers.

1. Fear of Pain: First and foremost, dentistry should NOT hurt. The effectiveness of today's anesthetics will make any procedure painless. I make sure that if any of my patients are feeling discomfort to let me know and I immediately stop and give more anesthetic. There is no reason why anyone should be "white knuckling" it throughout a procedure. Not only is this avoidable for our patients, but it is extremely stressful for your dentist, so please let your dentist know if you are uncomfortable or not numb enough.

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COLUMN

Dr. Haddad *Continued from page 12*

4. Loss of control: Fear of dentists stems not so much from the experience of pain as from the lack of control that patients experience in the dentist's chair, says Ellen Rodino, PhD, a psychologist in Santa Monica, CA, who has studied dental fear. "You're lying prone, a dentist is hovering above you, and he's putting you in a situation where you can hardly talk or respond. That creates a lot of anxiety for some people because they don't feel in control." This is where communication is key between the dentist and his or her patient. Making my patients aware that they can take the necessary breaks they need, whether it is just to rest their jaw, or to go to the restroom is very important. This is also reinforced when patients make me aware of any discomfort that they are feeling and we stop, make them comfortable, and then continue with the procedure.

5. Overall hatred of dental noises, smells, and sights: Noise cancelling headphones with your choice of music, shaded glasses and comforting blankets are standard in our office and patients love these amenities. However, this is also where oral sedation could be the key for certain patients. What if we could make a procedure feel like it was completed in half of the time with very little memory of the procedure itself? This is not only possible, but completely safe and predictable, and something that we do daily in our office. This also allows us to complete more dentistry in less visits which is very appealing to busy patients who don't have the time to take away from their work and family.

Advanced dentistry has found many ways to improve the overall dental experience for patients. The experience in our office needs

to be as elite as the final product. Over the years we have perfected the process so that our patients are as comfortable and stress-free as possible during their appointments. Hopefully, this will inspire some of you who have been avoiding the den-

tist to give dentistry another opportunity.

Jeffrey S. Haddad, DDS of Rochester Advanced Dentistry, completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the presti-

gious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ and sleep disorders and dental implants. For more information, visit www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com.



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