

O' pumpkin pie, your time has come 'round  
again and I am autumnrifically happy!  
~Terri Guillemets



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COLUMN

Is your dentist properly educating you?

Many people delay or even skip visits to the dentist due to anxiety and fear of the unknown. We have repeatedly witnessed this in our own practice over the years and are always trying to properly educate our patients on the importance of regular dental care. Recently, University of Florida researchers have identified “health literacy” (the difficulty in understanding and using health information), as another key reason people avoid the dentist. There are many ways that dentists can educate their patients, and help them to address any issues they may have, which in turn can help alleviate any fears or reservations about pending dental work.

Carefully listening to the patient and their concerns is a necessary first step in fixing the communication disconnect between patients and the dental team. Unfortunately, many health care providers do not take the time to hear what their patients are asking for, and instead, impose recommendations of treatment that they “think” the patient wants or needs. This only reinforces some of the negative perceptions by patients when they are at the dental office. It is so important that we take the time to listen to our patients, determine what their goals are, and offer options and solutions that will help them accomplish those goals. Only then will we have a chance to break the ongoing cycle of low health literacy and poor oral health.

Here are some techniques that we utilize in dentistry to help educate our patients:

1. Intraoral photos.



Dentally Speaking  
by  
Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S.

Photography is very effective in showing our patients any issues or potential problems in the mouth. We always want to instill trust in our patients so when a patient can view a problem with their own eyes, there is little doubt that an issue is present. This objective data alone can help patients clearly understand what is happening and make them comfortable with proceeding with treatment to rectify the problem.

2. Laser Cavity Detection. The days of the dentist “poking” instruments into

teeth and finding “sticky spots” resulting in cavities should be a thing of the past. With laser cavity detection, we are able to find cavities much earlier allowing us to be more conservative and sometimes even avoid anesthetic when treating these cavities. In addition, based on the reading of the instrument, the patient is assured that a cavity is truly there and that treatment is necessary before things progress.

3. Personalized treatment Consultations. Many times our patients have numerous questions about their dental treatment or are looking for solutions to help improve the appearance or function of their teeth. When this is the case, having a short conversation during a cleaning is not sufficient in my opinion. Therefore, I will recommend a consultation appointment that can include photos, models of certain dental solutions, and even a personalized Powerpoint presentation to help educate patients on their dental options.

4. Education during dental cleanings. Oral health is extremely important as it

has been linked with major health problems, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease. Therefore, we pride ourselves in sharing our knowledge with our patients at all of their hygiene visits. Our hygienists have been trained extensively in all areas of the dental field giving them the opportunity to answer any questions our patients may have. When specific issues are present, our dentists can then determine the proper path of treatment.

In my opinion, to improve communication, dental providers should avoid using technical language and explain the potential consequences of delaying treatment in terms that our patients can understand. “The take-home message from this study is that the dental team needs to make the patient the center of communication, and then tailor the oral health information so it is understandable and relevant to that patient,” said Henrietta Logan, Ph.D., a UF professor emeritus in the department of community dentistry and behavioral science. This study just reinforces how important it is for dental health providers to educate their patients and give them treatment options for them to choose from. Once our patients are aware of any dental concerns we identify, and how it may affect their overall health, they can feel comfortable making the right decision for themselves.

Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S. of Doolin & Haddad Advanced Dentistry completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ disorders and practice management.

For more information, visit [www.rochesteradvanced-dentistry.com](http://www.rochesteradvanced-dentistry.com).