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So what will it take to do implants?

By Jeffrey C. Hoos, DMD

As appeared in *Dental Economics*

We should be so proud of our dental profession and all the people who provide care in our offices. The Queens County Dental Society invited me to present a seminar on implant-supported overdentures. The audience ranged from new dentists to ones who have been in practice for over 45 years. They all wanted to learn, and we should take pride in this.

For many dentists, the concept of learning how to place implants seems difficult and time-consuming. To paraphrase Dr. Ken Judy, "If you can extract a tooth, do a complex root canal, and prepare an upper-left, second molar crown for a patient who can barely open [his or her mouth], you can learn to place and restore an implant."

The purpose of this month's column is not to convince anyone to run out and start learning how to place implants. The placement and restoration of dental implants require the same type of training and experience needed to perform other difficult procedures. I want to emphasize this important commitment to continuous learning and encourage you to try to learn something new to recharge your dental batteries.

I often visit with dentists attending my courses and ask them the simple question, "How is it going?" A recurring response is, "I am tired of all of this. When I retire, I will be so much happier!" Others will say, "I cannot get any of my patients to accept the treatment they need."

What causes dentists to become so unhappy and discouraged? I am sure the answer is different for everyone, but maybe there is a common thread we can talk about.

Here's an example. My daughter, Stephanie, has a severe lactose intolerance problem. She really suffers after birthday parties where pizza and ice cream are served. As a little girl, we, as parents, could control what she ate. However, as soon as Stephanie began making her own choices about what to eat (ice cream and pizza), the problems became dramatic. Now you would think Stephanie would understand the cause-and-effect relationship of the lactose-loaded food being responsible for her cramps and diarrhea. But she didn't ... not for a long time. When she finally did see the light, she passed on the ice cream because, in her words, "It's just not worth it."

How does this relate to dentistry and implants? A very smart man once said, "The definition of insanity, or maybe even stupidity, is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result." I think Stephanie figured, "Maybe someday I will eat ice cream and not get sick." Dentists who are unhappy and unfulfilled don't know what else to do, so they continue to "eat the ice cream." They need to learn a new skill to make dentistry more fun and rewarding. There are so many great courses available to dentists, covering everything from full-mouth reconstructions to how to avoid post-operative sensitivity problems with composite fillings.

If you are doing the same thing every day, achieving the same results, and those results are not satisfactory, you are practicing with "insanity." If you want different results, then change what you are doing. Learn a new skill. The more successful you are in your clinical experience, the more difficult procedures you will want to learn.

Maybe learning implants is the next step. That is what happened to me, and I was very fortunate to have great mentors in implantology such as Dr. Paul Whitman, Dr. Carl Mish, Dr. Ken Judy, Dr. Joel Arsenic,



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and Dr. Jack Hahn to help me along the way. Even though I teach implant dentistry, the learning still continues ... and I am not doing it on my own. I get out of my office and interact with my fellow dental professionals. Thank you all for helping to enhance my clinical and management skills. I know how hard it is to put these courses together and teach classes all day.

Sometimes, when our dental world seems so small in our own little office, we need to remember that many of us share similar experiences and some of us have found ways to "make it happen." If you are discouraged and feel alone in the office fighting the "battle of dental disease," and, more importantly, if you are unhappy with the clinical results you are getting, it's time to change something. My number one suggestion to "relove" dentistry would be to begin enhancing your clinical skills and avoid repeating the same procedures and techniques, expecting to achieve different results. Get out there and learn something new, more difficult, more exciting, and more rewarding.

Have an exciting, productive month, and until next time, keep looking for that balance.

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