

Results in Review

Newsletter for referring dental professionals

Issue 20

Review Your Records: Who haven't you seen lately? Where did they go?

Every dentist encounters patients who are afraid, perhaps even on a daily basis. Good listening skills, compassion and a gentle approach may be enough to help a patient overcome their fear. Nitrous oxide and/or oral conscious sedation can be employed successfully to treat an anxious patient. **But what about patients with phobias?**

Fear: A distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.

Anxiety: Distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune.

Phobia: A persistent, irrational fear of a specific object, activity, or situation that leads to a compelling desire to avoid it.

Definitions from <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

How can we recognize a phobic patient? Different from mildly anxious patients, phobics:

- Cannot be soothed or coaxed into receiving care,
- Go to a dentist only as a last resort,
- Make multiple appointments but rarely keep them,
- Are not well treated with nitrous oxide or oral medications,

- May unconsciously mask their fear by exhibiting anger towards the dental team.

The intensity of these patients' fears has a profound impact on their experience of life. Phobics often avoid all dental treatment, even simple preventative maintenance, resulting in progressive dental disease and missing teeth. They are at greater risk for health problems. They avoid smiling, laughing and fear the judgment of others - with detrimental effects to their friendships, dating and intimacy, and professional life. Years of embarrassment bring about low

self-esteem, self-blame and sometimes personality changes.

Phobic patients can present challenges for dentists and their office staffs. These patients are often caught in a vicious cycle - they avoid preventative maintenance, which leads to periodontal disease and decay. Over time, these conditions worsen and lead to pain and discomfort, which creates more fear and anxiety, and the cycle of avoidance of care continues. When they learn that their treatment will require multiple, lengthy appointments and consultations with specialists, they feel overwhelmed. Some will endure pain for years because they don't know how to overcome their fear.

Most phobic patients who start treatment quickly lose courage, and stop going to their appointments. Once that courage is lost, it takes years to get it back. Their treatment incomplete, their dental health continues to deteriorate further. The patient then loses confidence not just in the dentist, but in dentistry. For this reason, taking small steps with a phobic patient's treatment can often be counterproductive.



Do you have a patient who came in for an exam, but never received treatment? Maybe they are phobic!

If treating severe phobias falls outside the scope of your practice, the Blende Dental Group will consult with you, complete their treatment, and return them to you for continuing care.

Know of a patient who cannot get to your office?

Our dentists make **House Calls** to patients within 60 miles of San Francisco.

How does the Blende Dental Group treat phobic patients?

At the Blende Dental Group, we don't ask people to overcome their fears. We utilize I.V. sedation or general anesthesia to enable them to sleep through dental treatment, and condense extensive treatment with all dental specialists into one comprehensive visit so that patients don't have to "get up their nerve" for multiple visits. Phobic patients take comfort that our One-Sleep-Visit Dentistry™ ensures

that they will experience no pain, no smells, no sounds, no sensation and no memory of the procedure. Treatment is completed in a predictable way, with a predictable result. These patients return to their referring general dentist grateful for the referral; now their relatively non-invasive routine care can be accomplished without the fear of pain or embarrassment in their home office.

Classic Phobic Presentations (Treated to completion by the Blende Dental Group):



This patient finally sought treatment when she was planning an extended trip to Spain, and was afraid she would sneeze and # 8 would fall out.



To conceal his missing, decayed and broken teeth, this patient rarely smiled in front of his friends or co-workers due to embarrassment.



This patient is a professional businessman in Marin. He was initially referred to us by a general dentist - an emergency 4 years later finally brought him into the office. He presented with severe calculus, missing teeth and loss of vertical dimension.



This patient had not been to a dentist in more than 8 years. He was inspired to seek treatment after his wife (who is also dental phobic as well as agoraphobic) completed her care in our office after 20 years of not seeing a dentist.



This patient is a nurse, married to a successful corporate attorney, who lives in Washington D.C. The "sedation dentists" she located in D.C. were uncomfortable treating her, so she found us on the internet. She presented with 13 teeth remaining.



This corporate executive looks normal, both extra- and intra-orally. What's remarkable about this? Sometimes a patient's phobia isn't so clinically obvious. This patient has very severe dental anxiety, and sought us out specifically so that she could be asleep during her treatment.

What Can We Do for You?

When you've decided that a patient is no longer a candidate for treatment in your practice, due to health risk, emotional difficulty or non-compliance, the Blende Dental Group welcomes your referral. To find out more about partnering with our office, please call 800-575-3375.