

THE COMPLETE EXAMINATION

Generally, when dentists read a title like the one above about a complete examination, they start thinking along the lines of a comprehensive examination, oral cancer screening, two bitewings, a full mouth series or panorex, diagnostic casts, articulators, periodontal charting, complete medical history and temporomandibular joint examination. Truth be told, if I read another article like the one I just described about telling me how to do a complete examination on a patient, I think I'm going to be sick. I've sat through full day courses on doing a complete examination which taught me nothing more than I learned in dental school.

I am going to talk about a different kind of complete examination. This complete examination occurs every minute of every day in your dental office. This is a complete examination which I think every dentist needs to know about and needs to prepare for. I am talking about the complete examination that the patient gives you every second that they are in your office. Doctor, you and your staff are being examined completely by pairs of eyes and you are being scrutinized by the people who pay you. This is a complete examination that you have to pass in order to have a successful dental office in the year 2007.

What are your patients looking for while they are doing their complete examination of you? Certainly, it goes without saying that they are looking for quality dentistry in a safe, sterile environment. That line, by the way, I have seen in many dental offices as their mission statement. Don't you think that most patients take that for granted? I am sure that patients are not looking for a dirty dental office that reuses its anesthetic needles. The question is what are patients looking for beyond the basic dental office and what are they judging you on?

The number one thing the patient is examining is how are you going to treat THEM. They want to know how are you going to treat them as an individual person, not as just a mouth. Let me ask you a simple question that needs to be answered by you and every staff member in the office – when you come to the office, are you more concerned about you or are you more concerned about the patients? If the answer is you, then you have just failed the examination and patients can see right through it. I teach this to my audiences all the time – the dental office is about the patient, not about you. In this day and age when estimates range that 50% of dentistry is

elective esthetic treatment (based on dollars), you better be much more focused on what the patient wants than on what you want. If you are giving every patient that walks in the door a cookie cutter full mouth reconstruction worth \$60,000, then they know that it is not about them, they know that it is about you.

There is so much talk about the dental office being like Nordstrom's or the Ritz Carlton. Let me make this as simple as I can – you are not Nordstrom's or the Ritz Carlton! You will never be like Nordstrom's or the Ritz Carlton. I don't remember the last time I walked into a Ritz Carlton and heard dental drills whirring and cavitrons squealing. You can treat everyone who walks into your office like they do at Nordstrom's and that is as a real individual with real individual needs. You listen and cater to their needs and wants before you even go ahead and recommend any kind of treatment.

Here is the second part of the examination that you must pass as well. Is your office a state of the art dental office? For a dentist, the words “state of the art” means having every latest gadget and toy with bells and whistles flying everywhere. Easily, tomorrow you could go to a dental show like the Chicago Midwinter Meeting or the Greater New York Dental Meeting and spend a million dollars on everything from the latest in digital radiography to an in-office CT scan. That may be state of the art to you but is not necessarily being state of the art to your patients. State of the art dentistry to your patients means that you have techniques or technology that will give them what they want. What is it that patients want? They want minimally invasive, relatively painless, injection free (when possible) dentistry. Patients relate to what is state of the art by what they read and see in consumer magazines.

The three most popular state of the art techniques patients relate to now are one-hour whitening, lasers, and minimally invasive porcelain veneers called Lumineers. You cannot pick up a consumer article about dental esthetics without reading about in office one-hour whitening. Whether they need it or not, a patient walks into your office and if you do one-hour whitening, you are a state of the art dentist.

I think from a practice management and a clinical point of view, it is time to get a Waterlase MD dental laser into your offices. More than any other piece of technology we have ever invested in, the laser impresses patients the most! Why is that? The answer is because when they go to the

dermatologist, he's using a laser. When they go to the optomologist, she is using a laser. When they walk into a dental office, we're using a high speed drill, that patients remember from their youth and you are then an old fashioned dentist. I call this the James Bond experience. People really get turned on to lasers because they see them everywhere. The medical professionals have it, James Bond fights the bad guys with a laser, lasers are used as the latest technology in manufacturing and so many things that consumers see all of the time. When they finally see a laser in your office, you are a state of the art dentist in their eyes and have passed their complete examination.

Patients are asking more and more about the "oral-systemic link" and how it affects their health. There is no better tool to convince your patient that you are on the forefront of this rapidly growing movement than an examination using the Florida Probe, a computerized periodontal probing and charting system. They can see and hear the probing depths and then can watch the short periodontal education clips that come with the software. They can even take home a state-of-the-art periodontal chart that visually highlights problem areas in their mouth. They will leave your office knowing they have received individualized attention as they can take home a personalized risk assessment and a patient diagnosis sheet with their specific homecare instructions. With the Florida Probe, the routine periodontal exam has been transformed into a "Wow Factor" experience that your patient won't soon forget. The more you give them a complete examination, the more you will pass their complete examination.

Lumineers is the perfect example of what I am talking about. People these days are coming in and asking for Lumineers by name, not porcelain veneers. This is due to the very successful marketing by the Den-Mat Corporation in establishing this brand name with consumers. When a patient comes in and they ask for Lumineers because they require no or minimal preparation and are relatively painless, and you don't offer them, then you are just another dentist that hurts people in their eyes. Even if a patient walks into your office and they don't want veneers, when they see that you offer Lumineers and they immediately recognize it because of its successful branding, they know that you are a "state of the art" dentist. You've shown that you are committed to minimally invasive dentistry and that you really care about patients.

I know there are prominent esthetic lecturers who say that patients don't care about the aggressive preparations as long as they get the desired result. My simple response is that I don't know what planet their patients come from, but I do know that my patients care a lot. Given the choice between aggressive preparation and minimal or no preparation, people (and most dentists I know since I treat many dental professionals) will opt for minimally invasive dentistry every single time.

The next time any patient walks into your office, remember that you are not the only one giving an examination. Patients are looking at you, constantly evaluating you, your team and the entirety of your office to see if it is the appropriate choice for where they want to get their dental treatment. They are constantly interviewing you and using their eyes as their own diagnostic tools to see what kind of dental office you really have. State of the art techniques that patients care about like those mentioned above will help you get an A+ on your next exam. Good luck!