

# Is success stifling your practice?

*Improvements in materials and techniques are cause for celebration, not apologies.*

**By Ginny Hegarty**

When it comes to case acceptance, dentists could learn something from automakers. Each year, with great fanfare, carmakers roll out new, improved models. Without apology, this year's prized model is yesterday's news in less than 12 months. I've never heard anyone take issue with the fact that they paid \$20,000 for a car only to see a new model on the dealer's lot a few months later. In fact, the automobile industry flaunts this dedication to constant improvement, and many consumers buy new cars every two years just to keep up.

Dentistry also has a genuine, long-standing commitment to constant improvement. Why then do many dentists feel it necessary to apologize if new techniques and materials allow them to perform better dentistry today than they could achieve 10 or even five years ago?

The smile design crafted 10 years ago may still look good, but with today's materials it could be incredible. This is exciting news for patients. So why is it that so many dentists feel so protective of their work that they refrain from offering new services to their existing patients? This is a phenomenon peculiar to dentistry and one that needs to change.

## **Stop apologizing**

I recently observed a doctor escorting a long-time patient to the front office while saying, "I feel badly that the bridge I placed needs to be replaced, so I'm going to give you a 20-percent discount." The original bridge was placed in 1982 and functioned beautifully for 22 years. The patient wanted it replaced only for better esthetics because her gums have receded. The original work was a credit to this dentist's talent, skill and artistry. He has nothing to apologize for. But by offering a discount, that's what he's doing. This doctor should be commended for the fine service he provided for the past 22 years.

Part of the problem may be linguistic. Dentists have long been known to categorize restorations as "temporary" or "permanent." But "permanent" does not mean it will last forever, despite the fact that many doctors feel obliged to stand by their work indefinitely.

Not only is this mindset unrealistic, it is unfair to doctors and patients. It's unfair to doctors because the human body and the mouth are not static environments. Changes occur daily that are beyond the dentist's control. It's unfair to patients because in a misguided attempt to keep them happy, the dentist is denying them the opportunity to receive the best that dentistry has to offer. Offering patients the new improved version of a restoration doesn't obligate them to schedule an appointment any more than seeing a new brochure for this year's Lexus 330 ES obligates them to buy it. It shows them the possibilities. It gives them control.

### **Give all patients the best**

Do you review each recare patient's films as you would a new patient's records, with complete objectivity? You owe it to yourself and your patients to create treatment plans for your patients of record using the same standards and criteria that you use when making recommendations to new patients. Just because the amalgam you placed six years ago is performing well doesn't mean you shouldn't let your patient know there are other choices available to them. They may not appreciate the finer details of the perfectly burnished margins; they may want a tooth that looks natural. If you don't offer these choices, your patient may be thrilled to find a new dentist that does.

### **Get ahead of the game**

Should the staff be prepared to use the intraoral camera or update radiographs? Is it time for the doctor to have a heart-to-heart talk about how the decisions the patient makes today will impact future choices? By making these assessments before the patient arrives, you will be much better prepared and more effective with your case presentation.

The administrative staff can take advantage of this information and be sure they are up to speed with all the pertinent financial/insurance information to assist the patient in making decisions following your treatment discussions. No more waiting or getting back to patients after you've verified their insurance coverage or spoken with the doctor about their needs.

Maybe the best reason of all for sharing the great advances in dentistry with patients is to share your own enthusiasm and create energy in your practice. Growth is the natural result of passion and gusto, and it's essential if your practice is to remain vital. I recently read a company profile that stated that 90 percent of the company's profits came from work the company was not doing six years ago. Imagine where that company would be today if they hadn't embraced growth and change.

What do the next six years hold for you and your practice? Don't let yesterday's success stand in the way of your future accomplishments. Celebrate your passion for excellence in dentistry and share it with your patients and staff. h

*Posted by [dentalproducts.net](http://dentalproducts.net). Originally published in the July 2004 Dental Practice Report. Copyright 1999-2004 Advanstar Dental Communications.*