

KEN GOLDSTEIN: Not the Dentist Again!

As a dentist and especially an Endodontist in Marietta Ga., I can attest to a patient's fears and anxieties when coming to the dental office. Fear of the dentist is still huge. Many patients would still rather deal with the pain than come see a dentist. Dental anxiety does not affect a certain population. It is worldwide. Statistics show 2.5 to 20 percent of the population is fearful of the dentist. Unfortunately, studies also show females are more fearful of the dentist which may stem from an unpleasant past dental experience. However, in my practice, I also see male patients who have had bad past experiences as well. Therefore, it is our job as dentists to turn the tables of fear and anxiety into a positive experience. The first step in reversing our patient's fears is actually just talking to our patients. What about the dental appointment brings on the anxiety? It's important to find out what happened in the past so the dentist can make changes and hopefully create a safe environment for the anxious patient. Patients have stated the smell of the office, the color of the walls, the PPE that is used (gloves, mask, etc), what the staff is wearing and the actual "vibe" of the office can elicit anxiety or fear. With this information, the dentist could make sure these triggers are nonexistent or at the very least controlled. Other triggers that patients have mentioned are the music they hear in the office. I have been asked to turn the music off in the office to appease a few patients' fears. We as dentists must do what we can in order to make our patient's dental experience less stressful and thus anxiety free.

Regrettably, there are patients who have been severely traumatized in the past from a dental appointment and these patients may need some counseling by a therapist. These patients can learn coping mechanisms such as relaxation techniques, deep breathing exercises, making a list of what concerns the patient has and even setting up a tour of the dental office. We have also found scheduling first thing in the morning helps so the anxious patient is not waiting to be seen.

One more avenue that may be beneficial for the anxious patient is oral anti-anxiety medication such as Xanax, Valium, Halcion or even nitrous oxide to help relax our patients.

It's important for our patients to know the dental office is a safe place and hopefully will not put off the necessary dental work needed.

Dr. Ken Goldstein has been in private practice in Marietta for 27 years. He is the founder of Marietta Endodontics and can be reached at g_ken@bellsouth.net.

