

## It's all in the sequence: Community health

Modern dentistry has the ability to successfully manage many oral diseases. Members of our respective communities who are aware of the value of oral health work with their attending dentists to maintain the entire dentition in an attractive state of health and function for their entire lives. This realistic goal is being achieved in communities around the world, and an important part of every successful dental practice is providing information to the people of our communities. Education creates appreciation for the value of good oral health among all populations. As awareness grows, demand for dental services increases. Everybody wins.

With increased levels of oral health and appearance comes an improved public attitude toward dentistry, increased awareness of the value of dental services, and increased demand for dental services. Successful dentists and their organizations will position themselves to be community experts and will devise proactive roles to insure broad distribution of reliable oral health information.

Regardless of industrial and organizational support for oral health, however, it is always the individual dentists and members of their teams who ultimately interact with the residents of a given community. It is the individual dental team member who has the ultimate contact with beneficiaries of oral health science. This remains the strongest advantage of the dentist-patient relationship.

As dentists assume leadership roles in improved oral health levels for the individuals, families, and groups of their respective communities, a few basic strategies must be devised to increase overall community awareness of dental needs and simultaneously increase demand for dental services.

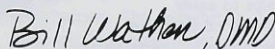
1. How do I best protect and promote the oral health of all individuals in my community?
2. How do I increase and promote the effectiveness of institutional and community-based programs that improve and expand access to oral health services?
3. How do I insure sensitivity among the entire community about the trends and realities of providing and financing oral health care?
4. How do I discover and utilize community resources that promote oral health and prevent oral disease?

Adequate answers to these basic questions demand high personal involvement in the planning and institution of various community oral health programs. Through this level of involvement, broad public support for various educational and access programs will emerge. However, fundamental preventive oral health pro-

grams must be in place in our practices, so that what we *do* for our patients is congruent with what we *say* in the public forum. The fundamental services of a modern preventive practice include:

1. Thorough examination and assessment of all patients, including physical status; health history; full hard and soft tissue examination of the mouth, face, and neck; radiographic survey; occlusal evaluation with mounted study casts; biopsies of nonresolving soft tissue lesions; caries activity assessments; and assessment of periodontal disease activity
2. Regular thorough recall examination, oral prophylaxis, and oral hygiene instruction for all patients of record
3. Early treatment of oral and dental lesions, placement of properly contoured restorations, and replacement of missing teeth
4. Topical and systemic regimens for prevention of caries and periodontal disease
5. Interceptive orthodontic procedures when indicated
6. Timely referral to both dental and medical specialists when indicated
7. Appropriate premedication regimens when indicated
8. Infectious disease, biohazard, and radiation safety measures
9. Provision of mouthguards for patients at risk for traumatic oral injuries
10. Recommendation of nutritional strategies that insure systemic health and function
11. Recommendation of personal well-being strategies to insure optimal physical and emotional health

The summary of this editorial is simple: none of us who practice dentistry can deliver our wonderful new services without a patient who is available, desires good oral health, is willing to pay a fair fee for it, and will take the dominant role in maintaining optimal oral health. Community involvement is mandatory if we wish to be recognized and respected as a concerned and vital part of overall community health. Our dental practices must include comprehensive offerings that support individual and community wellness. When all the pieces are in place, everybody wins.



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