

TREATING SYMPTOMS VS DIAGNOSING SYSTEMS

Treat symptoms (results of disease) or diagnose systems (causes of disease)?

One of the biggest joys I have in life is working with a patients who want to become healthier and enter a co-learning process with me. We become partners, in that they soon understand what our mutual roles will be in their becoming healthier. They become active participants in their diagnosis, prevention, and treatment processes and soon discover how important their oral health is to their overall health and that this discovery could be a life changing event.

I have spent countless hours throughout the last 35 years studying far above the norm to become the best dentist I can be. This learning adventure has been joyful, insightful, laborious and satisfying – but I will never be completely satisfied as long as there is more to learn. I have had mentors along the way that have taught me how a healthy mouth appears and functions as a system, and how an unhealthy one will breed continual dental problems as well as negatively impact the state of one's systemic health. Realizing this, I cannot just treat the effects of dental disease without first addressing the cause and then teaching the patient what their responsibility is in the oral health equation. I believe that patient education is vitally important...the word *doctor* means *teacher*. Therefore, I have made a commitment to spending adequate time in the beginning of the new patient experience to first learn about them, and then provide them with the information that they need to make an informed choice about their dental care.

I have found that most new dental patients are seeking remedies for problems such as tooth decay, gum disease and improvement in chewing ability and appearance. Historically dentists have satisfied these needs by filling, crowning and cleaning teeth, providing whitening procedures, veneers, porcelain crowns and implants to replace teeth. Today, this continues to be the modus operandi of most practicing dentists. I do all of the above, however in a more calculated and holistic manner. I perform a complete oral examination not just to discover “how many cavities or gum pockets patients have,” or “how I can replace your missing teeth with implants,” or how “six or eight veneers on front teeth can solve your appearance problems,” but in so doing, I offer a thorough diagnosis of the entire oral system. After years of being a student, a teacher, and a practicing dentist I know how a stable and attractive mouth should appear and function as a healthy system, therefore I cannot just jump in and fix problems that could be the result of a system not being in harmony. I want to first take my patient along with throughout the diagnostic process to learn about and correct the cause(s), I want to know the

answers to a number of questions such as: Why are teeth crooked or worn? Why is there jaw joint noise and pain? Could neck, head aches and migraines be the result of an oral system being out of balance? Could broken teeth be the result of their not meeting properly? Could bleeding gums be causing a systemic health risk? These are all questions that need to be considered prior to performing any treatment, excepting of course for pain and social (appearance) emergencies. It is the difference between continuing down a path of reacting to the effects of dental disease, or being proactive in first determining their causes - the difference between treating symptoms and diagnosing systems.

I believe that my background and experience obligates me to teach my patients about the causes of their dental problems rather than have them continue along a lifetime cycle of repair and replacement. My role is similar to a mountain climbing guide who would offer the proper knowledge and equipment to get to the top. Dental patients can also get to the top if they have as much interest in their health as I do and understand the importance of working together as a team. When dental treatment is diagnosed correctly, planned carefully and performed properly with a holistic approach that considers the entire oral system, it can be one of the best investments made as it can offer a lifetime of oral and improved systemic health!

My in-office, "Doc Talks" represent my commitment to teach, remembering at all times that the word Doctor means "Teacher." I offer information that will help individuals understand how the mouth functions as a system and why their oral health has an influence over their overall physical health.