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Staying connected to the dental profession

News focus: Petrified of the dentist?

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It is unfortunate that dental professionals are more often than not greeted with trepidation from patients.

They often visit when they are in pain and keeping appointments is an inconvenience, but they do go, they receive treatment and go about their lives until they require their services once more.

Imagine how it must feel for a patient who is absolutely petrified of the dentist?

For a dental phobic, inconvenience would be welcome as opposed to debilitating fear.

A phobia is defined as an extreme or irrational fear of aversion to something.

In the case of a dental phobic, these very real fears can range from embarrassment of oral hygiene through to fear of equipment (needles, drills etc) and even anaesthesia and choking.

Dr Anoop Maini, BDS (Lond), DGD (UK) of Aqua Dental Spa in London has a great deal of experience in treating patients with dental phobia.



Here, he outlines what's vital in putting that patient at ease.

'It is important to first of all acknowledge the condition. It is a very real fear and some patients have nightmares and a feeling of dread about a dental appointment, I have even treated severe cases with patients needing anti depressants and help with insomnia.

Managing dental phobia correctly is essential or the problem may be compounded. Most patients will always have the fear but if treated correctly, you will be able to create a preventative regime that a patient will adhere to.

For the dental phobic, visiting the dentist is normally the last resort. In most cases, a patient will present in an agitated or frightened state and in severe pain. In the successful treatment of a dental phobic, identifying the symptoms is one of the first steps.

While this may seem a very basic principle, it's an important part of overcoming the fear. Some patients will feel embarrassed by their fear and not voice their concerns about the treatment and struggle through the appointment, dreading their next trip to the dentist and so the vicious circle continues.

It may be that once recognised, a sympathetic ear and clear precise information away from a clinical environment is enough to help treat the phobia and encourage regular oral maintenance. As professionals we try our best to make a patient as comfortable as possible and taking the time to spot a phobic will result in a more positive experience for both dentist and patient.

On the other hand, a dental phobic may be very forth coming with the information about their fears even before they set foot in the practice. They may specifically seek you as their dentist because you are open to dental phobia and understand the complaint.

This is most definitely the case for us and while some people heard about our work with dental phobia through recommendations, many have found us online at www.dentalphobia.co.uk and specifically reached out to us because we can cater for their condition.

Within two months of obtaining our dental phobia certification and placement on the Patient Directory of Dental Phobia Certified Dentists, we had numerous calls from patients that required our services.

This highlighted to me just how common the complaint was and I wanted to be sure that no matter the level of phobia, we could competently and expertly handle the situation.

At Aqua Dental Spa, our dental phobia team works as a unit to offer a non-typical approach to treatment. The onus is on trust and compassion.

We always start any interaction in a non-clinical environment and schedule time for a conversation to research the patient, establish their underlying fears and create a treatment plan that will offer the highest possibility for success.

Conducting an interview such as this in a non-threatening environment really helps to break down barriers; patients normally start airing their concerns and talking openly about their condition.

We can start to build a treatment plan and explore the medicinal options that can help during treatment, decide on action and products and even the holistic treatments that will provide relief.

Necessity-based dentistry, as we all know, is a huge problem and dealing with a patient who suffers from dental phobia will require planning the same way that you would conduct the treatment planning of someone with a physical medical condition.

Although mostly unwarranted – and almost completely out of step with modern dentistry – this condition is a very real complaint that should be addressed with sympathy and compassion with a view to building a trusting, open relationship between practitioner and patient.'

Author

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Dr Anoop Maini DGDP (UK), BDS (Lond) graduated from Kings College in 1992. Dr Maini has a special interest in functional cosmetic rehabilitations from his practice at Aqua Dental Spa , London W1. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.