

A Real Patient's View



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Introduction by David Lind

Recently my 22 year old daughter returned home after graduating from university. She shared this story with me and I asked her to share it with you as I believe this real life story has valuable lessons for all of us connected to dentistry. This is certainly not directly related to my traditional subjects in dealing with the value drivers when buying and selling a dental practice. It is however, vitally important as the intangible she refers to is goodwill which as you'll see has immeasurable value to her, and to most patients. Here is her story.

When I started University in 2010, my oral health seemed like a small matter compared to other things I was facing. I was concerned with fitting in, partying, and spending late nights studying and drinking RedBull. Needless to say, my teeth were on the back burner, and suffered accordingly. After researching my health plan, my parents gave me the name of a dentist to visit close to campus, and after much procrastination, I booked an appointment. I never had really bad oral health as a kid, but I knew this appointment was not going to go well.

The appointment was a series of hurtful proceedings, one after the next. First, the hygienist; she asked me the normal questions: "What is your current brushing schedule? Do you floss regularly? Do you drink a lot of sugary drinks?" She didn't hide the fact that she thought little of me because of the state of my teeth, and I tried to answer the questions as directly as possible to avoid further humiliation. When the dentist came in, he spent about 30 seconds looking in my mouth, and nodded to the hygienist. He said very little and made no effort to make me feel comfortable. I left the office quickly after scheduling my next appointment, and went home with a knot in my stomach at the thought of returning later that month. I had not told the office that I was suffering from bulimia, but I was sure that was contributing to the degradation of enamel. I had not been comfortable enough before the appointment to bring it up, and I certainly wasn't going to after the experience I had, even though I knew it might have an effect on the treatment plan.

When I went back for my fillings, I tried to tell myself that I was not a bad person because I had neglected my teeth, and that the professionals at the office didn't think that either. Their attitudes however, proved me wrong. Once again the dentist and his assistant were demeaning in the comments they made about my teeth, and spoke to me as if I were a child. Leaving that appointment, I vowed not to go back to the dentist, I hated it, and felt it was an awful experience.

A few years later, after much prodding from my mother, I decided to go visit the dentist again. Between my last appointment and this appointment, I had continued to neglect my teeth and felt exasperated with the whole dental profession in general (which is ironic, considering my parents' line of work). This time, I was expecting similar treatment from the dentist and hygienist, knowing that I would be judged for the condition of my oral health. I had however, made a full recovery from my eating disorder, and so I thought maybe it wouldn't be as bad.

However, it was even *worse* than it had been on my last visit. My cleaning was unpleasant. The hygienist was displeased, even disgusted with the condition of my oral health, and made it known to me and to the dentist who designed my treatment plan. I needed three appointments to get all the work done. They were not impressed with me. Booking my appointment to come back for fillings, I had the same knot in my stomach that I'd had years ago, but I knew I needed the treatment and thus decided to endure the humiliation.

I returned for the first appointment less than a week later, and was shaking by the time I sat down in the chair. Much to my surprise, the new dentist who carried out my treatment plan and the assistant had a different attitude than I was used to. Both were very pleasant. They asked me some questions about school, asked about my plans for the holidays, and both treated me like a person; not a rotten mouth. The dentist was very gentle, and explained to me that she wanted to make sure I was comfortable throughout the procedure. The assistant was so upbeat and pleasant, and helped to calm my nerves. They worked well together, and included me in their conversations, even though I could only make noises in response. For the first time in my dental office experience, I knew they weren't judging me for the mistakes I had made with my teeth. They genuinely cared about my oral health, and wanted to make it better. After my three appointments, I had a whole new mouth, and a whole new perspective. It changed the way I felt about my teeth, and ultimately the way I felt about myself.

I have now graduated from university, and am a healthy and happy young woman. I feel like I have the chance to make a fresh start, and am not being held back by the poor choices I made in the past. I have a newfound confidence and a bright smile, which I owe to that dentist. I never thought I would say it, but I look forward to my next visit with her!

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