

Private Dentistry October

Henry Hoy, Principal of 110 Dental in Chinnor has some timely guidance on overcoming stress

So exactly how concerned should we dentists be about stress levels and burnout?

I graduated from Birmingham University in 1976 and my love for dentistry grew and blossomed when I embraced CEREC dentistry in 2000. I still wake each morning and look forward to the work I am going to do. Do I have some magic antidote to all the stress related physical and emotional problems that seem to beset the profession? The answer, of course, is no. But what I do have is a great deal of experience and accumulated knowledge and sharing these with you, particularly if life is getting on top of you right now, may be helpful.

We are told that dentists' problems include an above average incidence of everything from cardiovascular disease and ulcers to eye strain and marital disharmony. We are told that the reasons include working in a confined space (unkindly likened to a prison cell), practising alone, economic pressures, keeping to unrealistic time schedules, compromise treatment frustration, patient anxiety, lack of exercise and the fact that many of the personality traits that characterise a good dentist are also traits that predispose to depression in mid life.

OK that's the bad news. Is there anything we can do to avoid driving ourselves into early graves? I would say, yes, absolutely there is and whilst there is never going to be an holistic solution to every difficulty we face, there is much you can do that will help make your career long and rewarding in every sense.

Don't try this at home

The overriding rule is not to take the practice home with you. Whatever your lifestyle and circumstances, give yourself, and whoever you share your life with, a break. Don't get into that way of thinking that says nothing can go on without you and that by worrying about every problem it will somehow disappear.

What I do is ensure that problems are discussed in a structured way in the practice and individuals (willingly) have responsibility for resolving those problems. Yes the buck stops with me but it's good sense to demonstrate your trust in people. I don't try and control everything and then get stressed out because I'm actually not focused on being a good dentist.

For me one of the real benefits of keeping home and business apart was that my children actually fell in love with dentistry! The very fact that oral hygiene was never a top discussion topic over Sunday lunch meant that my daughters and son could visit the practice, meet people and generally lend a hand whenever the mood took them. As a result of 'liking what they saw' my daughter, Beth, has now joined me in the practice as a specialist endodontist; my son David is set to take over our general dental side and daughter Louisa works with us (and other practices) as an hygienist.

Fit for practice?

Here comes the bit where you say something along the lines of.....'you don't really need to tell me that'....but I will. In addition to not taking work home, don't work ridiculous hours, do keep weekends clear, do make sure you and your staff can rest and relax for sensible amounts of time during the working day and above all take regular exercise and encourage your staff to do the same.

And no excuses. I used to water ski until I broke my leg but I still play tennis and love gardening. I'm nearer 70 than 60!!

By caring more about yourself and your staff you will create a calmer, friendlier and more relaxed atmosphere in the practice. In our practice an important aspect of caring is thorough training. I don't believe in throwing people in at the deep end because they will make mistakes that aren't their fault, feel resentful and probably leave. Train your team properly and you will retain their loyalty **and** increase your efficiency.

A stress free environment

One of the great ironies is that some of the most stressed dentists insist on trying to create stress free environments for their patients. I was talking to Gavin Willis about this the other day. Gavin runs Paradigm Design Solutions and probably knows more about how dentists tick than anyone 'in the trade'. He told me that one of the main challenges he has is trying to convince his clients to step away from the temptation to play designer and project manager.

I understand this. When we extended our practice (we purchased the dental laboratory next door), I had some clear views about what I wanted. The point is that a number of my ideas, had they been implemented, would have been totally counterproductive in relation to creating the relaxing, welcoming practice I had in mind. In contrast Gavin knows exactly how to use space to best advantage, optimise surgery layout and workflow and minimise clutter. Above all he understands the stresses of dentistry and the foibles and anxieties of patients. And his enthusiasm is contagious!

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