

VIEW FROM THE PRACTICE

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

A holistic approach means treating the mind and spirit alongside the body. Rahul Doshi looks at how this can be incorporated into the dental practice

After accompanying a relative on a recent health checkup with his doctor, amongst various other good advice, the doctor also pronounced the importance of relaxation and various other remedies to be able to lead a more balanced and harmonious lifestyle. This way of thinking is often coined the 'holistic' approach. It encompasses the whole person, not only the physical body but also the mind and spirit. We have all experienced to some extent how physical ailments can have a negative effect on our emotional welfare. This I believe to also be true of dental issues.

Patients that suffer from dental issues often present to us with the physical signs and symptoms. However, how many of these observations are also having a negative impact in other ways. Sometimes patients are not even aware that they have a detrimental condition in the mouth such as toothwear, but do feel that their teeth are not as they once were. So, how can we accommodate a holistic approach into dentistry?

The holistic dental approach takes care of not only the body and the physical pain but also of the total wellbeing of the patient to include the emotional and spiritual health. General dentists who assess patients for the entire mouth will often notice that during post-treatment when the mouth has been restored back to health there is a huge impact on not only the physical but also the psychological and emotional well being of the patient. Patients often say that they now 'feel' better or have much improved confidence. This draws upon the way in which we as dentists should approach examination and assessment of our patients.

Rahul Doshi BDS LDSRCS is the senior clinical director of The Perfect Smile Advanced Training Institute in Hertford and offers hands-on training courses in aesthetic dentistry. He lectures both in the UK and abroad and is PPD's clinical editor. www.theperfectsmile.co.uk

FIVE KEY AREAS

There are essentially five key areas to holistic dentistry and should be considered in detail during any examination and treatment planning:

1 Biological improvement. Here we are looking to improve and treat the biological deterioration of the mouth including caries, periodontal care and oral pathology.

2 Structural integrity. Each tooth in the mouth must be looked at individually also to make sure that it is not only healthy but also well protected from occlusal pressures. It can be too easy to restore teeth without considering future conditions.

3 Functional harmony. Occlusal imbalance I feel can be the culprit behind many oral issues. Therefore it is of utmost importance to marry the dentistry in such a way as to eliminate occlusal interferences and/or to stabilise the occlusion. Any discrepancy in this area can lead to failure and thereafter an impact on the patients well being through loss of confidence or detriment. It is all about creating harmony between the TMJ, muscles and the occlusion.

4 Cosmetic enhancement. All treatment plans must establish the basic principals of smile design so that the end dentistry is complementary of the face and mouth. For example if only a few anterior teeth are being treated, they must be treated so that they are complementary with cosmetic improvements, at the same time as optimising their health.

We have now established quite clearly the vital impact cosmetic dentistry can have on the emotional and psychological health of patients. There are numerous studies pointing to the importance of cosmetic dentistry on confidence, lifestyle, careers and self-esteem.

5 Stability and prevention. It is important to have a plan of action that will not only stabilise the oral conditions but also prevent any future deterioration in health and function.



AN ALL-ROUND APPROACH

Holistic dentistry is about taking all aspects of the mouth into consideration. Anything less is compromised dentistry. Occasionally this compromise is necessary as it may fall into the requirements of patient objectives, but not until the patient has been fully informed of the holistic approach. Thereafter, the decisions made can be based upon a comprehensive knowledge of the limitations and breadth of each treatment option or plan.

As part of the dental profession our quest should be for optimal health and total wellness. Comprehensive assessments will allow for improved treatments plans that enable fixing the cause of the condition, not just alleviating the symptoms. However, the treatment planning must also take into consideration how the patient feels about the options and what their dental objectives and goals are. We must also endeavour to 'fix' the reason they have come to us and that which is the cause of their discontentment. The entire team can also be involved in making the patient comfortable and relaxed to experience holistic dentistry.

This means they can have the dentistry of their choice that fits in with their dental goals and hence they start to feel better about their mouths. Hopefully this will also have the desired positive effects on their general health.

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