

## Why a Wellness Center?

Early in my dental career I had to make several risky choices to further my professional dream - that of providing unparalleled preventive and treatment services for my patients. All of my colleagues were contracted with dental insurance companies that automatically gave them a marketing advantage by being on a list from which patient enrollees selected their dentist. This did not set well with me as I wanted to work for my patients, not the insurance companies with their “Least Expensive Alternate Treatment” (LEAT) philosophy. The insurance companies are still in the Stone Age when it comes to preventive and quality care with yearly patient benefit allowances that have not changed since they came into being in the 1960’s. This necessitated my withdrawal from insurance contracts which was quite liberating for me, but also presented substantial challenges as over half of my patients were enrolled with Delta Dental Insurance, the largest dental insurance carrier in the U.S. Not being trained as an educator, could I effectively teach my patients the fundamental differences between a traditional type of dental practice and a wellness\*-centered practice so they could comprehend their differences? It began with the process of embracing the true definition of the word “doctor,” which emanates from several languages to mean “teacher.”

When a dentist uses the “wellness” label, it infers that he has taken a holistic\* path, which is a much less traveled road in the dental profession. He realizes that true oral health cannot be dispensed only through fillings, cleanings, crowns, veneers, implants, etc., even though he may be quite proficient in each of these technologies. Attaining oral health is equally the result of patient learning (doctor as “teacher”), which requires healthy interactions between the dentist and patient wherein their mutual roles can be defined and agreed upon. The wellness doctor develops a solid, mutual trusting relationship with his patients wherein they each commit to their respective roles as teacher/student. This creates a comfort level that allows for meaningful discussions between the doctor and patient, working together to understand the sources of past problems and offering solutions to remedy them. It saddens me to see new patients that have been deprived of this process, resulting in a low trust of dentists which only stands in the way of attaining the true oral and systemic (general) health that they deserve.

Some examples of the differences between traditional and wellness approaches to dentistry:

### Traditional

- Looks at mouth as components rather than an oral system
- Primarily ‘production’ oriented
- Emphasis on treating results rather than discovering causes
- Treatment services influenced by insurance benefit allowances

### Wellness

- Trained in viewing and treating the mouth as a system within other bodily systems and the connection between oral and systemic health
- Sees relationship building as a primary focus
- Discovers causes before recommending treatment
- No 3<sup>rd</sup> party (insurance) decision influence
- Understands that the long-term value of his services trumps the lower cost of “usual” care

*\*Wellness: the quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, esp. as the result of deliberate effort; an approach to healthcare that emphasizes preventing illness and prolonging life, as opposed to emphasizing treating diseases.*

*\*Holistic: Emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts.*

Some specific examples of the differences between traditional and wellness evaluation and treatment services:

	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Wellness</b>
Periodontal (gum) health:	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Gum perspective only</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gum measuring (maybe)</li> <li>• Cleanings and deep scalings</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Oral: Systemic connection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oravital oral biofilm analysis</li> <li>• Phase microscopic plaque assessment</li> <li>• Gum measuring with a digital probe for ultra accurate measurements</li> <li>• Individualized gum health regimens based upon above assessments</li> <li>• Laser assisted gum treatments</li> </ul>
Teeth	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Teeth perspective only</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checks for cavities</li> <li>• Passive, not interactive preventive treatments</li> <li>• Uses mercury fillings</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reverse decay environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PH tests for oral environment susceptibility to decay (cavities)</li> <li>• Protocol for reversing decay susceptibility with continual monitoring</li> <li>• Involvement of patient, not just passive cleanings or fluoride treatment</li> <li>• Concern for dental materials biocompatibility</li> <li>• Safe mercury removal protocol</li> </ul>
Appearance/ Smile	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cosmetics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whitening, veneers, crowns, bonding</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bioesthetics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whitening, veneers, crowns, bonding – guided by Bioesthetic form and function for treatment longevity</li> </ul>
TMJ Head/neck pain Migraines	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Symptomatic Treatment Only</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medications</li> <li>• Nightguard</li> <li>• Counseling</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bigger Picture: Mouth a system within systems</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discovers cause, as understands the interrelationship of oral form and function</li> <li>• Bioesthetic evaluation – use of jaw simulators</li> <li>• Stabilization of TMJ's – relief of symptoms</li> <li>• Dental treatment that lasts and is esthetic</li> </ul>

A holistic dentist realizes the long-term value of his services and seeks patients who also want to look at the bigger picture for a preferred dental future. This is what distinguishes my wellness-centered practice from the traditional dental practices of today.