

## The Differentiator

What really differentiates a holistic from a traditional dentist? I believe that it begins with an attitude on the part of the dentist emphasizing discovering the nature of and prevention of oral problems, rather than one of simply treating and repairing their results. Behind this attitude must also lie the extra education and training that allows him to offer solutions to his patients that go beyond the usual cosmetic teeth repair and replacement protocols that are commonly broadcast on dentist websites, advertising media and “dental makeover” TV programs.

An essential attribute of a holistic approach is an understanding on the part of the dentist that true health cannot be dispensed via a cleaning, filling, veneer, implant or crown any more than a Lipitor pill can address the cause of high cholesterol. It must be developed through application of workable protocols that involve patient compliance based upon their high interest in becoming healthy – an interest that has been aroused through a process that lets them understand the origin of their problems. This then, challenges the dentist to learn something quite elemental, yet nonexistent in professional school curricula; that of becoming an effective teacher, a role which over time has strayed afar from the very origin of the word “*doctor*,” meaning “*teacher*” in several languages.

True holistic care is rather rare in both the medical and dental professions, as the student selection process does not include a scrutiny of the candidates’ interpersonal skills or teaching ability. I believe that a holistic attitude emanates from an inherent personality attribute of wanting to do the right thing for patients backed by a passionate sense of curiosity. One that is intense enough to allow the new graduate, after having been unleashed within a system wherein the health community and patients alike are immersed within the predominant insurance-based, remedial, reparative mode, to be able to buck the prevailing tide and swim upstream to discover how to integrate his holistic disposition within the mainstream conventional milieu.

After many years of swimming against the tide, I am now being carried forward through discovering patients who actually are seeking what I have to offer, backed by a team that understands and supports the entire process of a patients’ attaining health. The process includes several key elements:

- First and foremost, having a patient whose basic attitude and interest matches mine in their becoming healthy.
- Their learning the essentials of our preventive and treatment protocols so that they can also become knowledgeable - and participants in their own care.
- Through the above, a motivation on the part of the patient that will impel them to attain the level of health that they desire.

Bernie Siegel, M.D., in his book, *Love, Medicine & Miracles* recognized this importance in saying “*We physicians must become instruments. When that happens, motivated patients will use us to work miracles.*”