

Holistic Dentistry—My View

Accurate definitions are important prior to a discussion of any subject matter. The word “holistic” is defined in the Thorndike-Barnhart dictionary as, “concerned with all factors, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, that affect health, rather than treating isolated diseases and symptoms.”

A dentist with a holistic approach is not just checking your teeth and gums, looking for decay and periodontal (gum) disease, or wanting to sell you on the idea of an improved smile through the wonders of cosmetic dentistry. To me, holistic dentistry means first getting to know the whole person, their attitudes towards dentistry and their desires regarding prevention and treatment. True health requires patient education, but I believe that the holistic dentist’s first priority is to educate himself about the patient before recommending what they may need or should want.

Traditional dentists and physicians have been in a reactive mode when it comes to treating disease, i.e., dentists who only repair decay and replace missing teeth, and, for example, physicians who react to high blood pressure solely with symptom controlling medications. In both cases the cause of the disease *is not* addressed.

In dentistry, a holistic approach is based on assessment of one’s oral health from two important perspectives: the state of health of teeth’s supporting gums and bone, and how proper function always includes natural, pleasant esthetics. An understanding of how a healthy and attractive mouth looks and functions, and how it influences and is influenced by the rest of the body. This understanding was brought about through careful research of people, some in their eighties and nineties who had exceptional oral health. Besides having attractive smiles, these people exhibited little, if any tooth wear or tooth loss, and most had no or very little dental treatment needs. In other words, the research was based on the study of health, not disease. By observing and measuring these fortunate individuals, it was found that, without exception, they had qualities in common that resulted in beauty, function, comfort, and longevity. It was discovered that their teeth arrangements not only resulted in a naturally attractive appearance, but were aligned in such a manner that there was harmony between the upper and lower teeth and their relation to the jaw joints (TMJ’s). This accounted for why they never experienced jaw joint noise or pain, head and neck discomfort, tooth loss, vertigo or migraines. The components of their oral systems were all working in harmony – TMJ’s muscles, ligaments, nerves, etc. - that precluded not only the above symptoms, but these people also had little or no decay or periodontal disease. The result: A model of oral health was discovered through careful observation of hundreds of healthy oral systems.

These qualities became the Bioesthetic Guidelines, directing the holistic dentist in his diagnostic, preventive and treatment efforts. This research has incalculable value, as any person with a compromised smile, or head and neck aches from an inharmonious bite

relationship can be assessed and treated towards this model of health & beauty discovered through the research of Mother Nature's success.

Probably the most important word for a holistic dentist is *diagnosis*. Not only for the dentist to learn the individual nature of the patient's oral and general health status, but in so doing, he can then teach his patient for the first time, the cause(s) of their problems. The new esthetic and replacement technologies can then be designed within a template of health, encompassing the Bioesthetic Guidelines that will lead the patient to a healthy, attractive, disease-free dental condition. The power of Bioesthetic Dentistry is that its principles can be universally applied by *all* dental disciplines to *all* dental system problems. Bioesthetic Dentists have the knowledge and skill development to treat proactively towards a specific optimal health goal.