

BETTER TEETH RESTORATION

for
accident
victims

by Thomas J. Balshi, D.D.S., F.A.C.P.

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Many lawyers representing accident victims are letting down both their clients and themselves because, understandably, they are not aware of what can be accomplished through modern prosthetic dentistry. Errors of judgment are made commonly by counselors willing to settle for treatment that, by contemporary standards, is less than the best available.

Every attorney fully appreciates the severe physical and mental devastation caused by traumatic injury, particularly in automobile disasters where facial injury occurs. Jaw injuries and dental trauma may impair the victim's ability to chew, alter speech patterns, produce pain in the jaw and/or catastrophically destroy a distinctive smile.

The psyche reacts violently to sudden loss of teeth. Absence of one's characteristic smile often is equally as traumatic as limb dismemberment. Physical

artistically shaped teeth, nearly equal to nature's own, and as permanent as any teeth can be which did not originate in the patient's own mouth.

The need for such treatment is not always obvious. Serious accident patients are generally hospitalized and treated for life-threatening conditions long before dental problems are recognized or diagnosed. Often, recovering patients are released from the hospital and returned to their family dentist for correction of traumatically induced dental injuries.

For some, the mere replacement of teeth, any kind of teeth, is sufficient. Others have a strong desire to seek perfection in the replacement of teeth. The motivation of the more demanding is easy to understand.

Importance of the Smile

Contemporary society places enormous importance on the smiles of in-

thesis. This procedure generally involves removable bridges, removable partial dentures or simply "partials". Another category of the removable prosthetic appliance is the complete removable denture, which replaces all of the teeth. These are sometimes referred to as "plates", an antiquated and improper term.

When only some teeth are lost, a partial denture can be used to replace the patient's missing teeth. In such cases, the existing natural teeth are used to aid in securing the tooth replacement prosthesis. Frequently, hooks and wires or clasps are used to hold the removable prosthesis in place. Since this procedure can be done rapidly, at modest cost to the patient and low overhead to the practitioner, it has become commonly used.

Some patients with these removable appliances have been sadly committed to wearing the uncomfortable, bulky and often unsightly replacement restorations, for lack of an alternative. Not only are removable appliances often cosmetically poor, but they frequently have continuous detrimental effect on the remaining natural teeth, as well as gum

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destruction of teeth, bone and gum tissue clearly undermine the individual's self esteem. However, the extent of the psychological damage often goes unnoticed far beyond the time of the accident.

Teeth Won't Heal

A fractured arm or leg usually can be treated by current orthopedic or surgical means, with lasting results. Fortunately, the body will usually heal itself totally in cases of bone fractures and soft tissue lacerations. Unfortunately, fractured teeth will not heal as do bones, skin and tissue.

The replacement of missing teeth, or parts of teeth, and other oral tissues requires prosthodontic intervention. This means provision of architecturally sound,

individuals, and the condition of their teeth. Job positions, as well as social interaction, are significantly influenced by one's physical appearance. Broken teeth, crooked teeth, discolored teeth and missing teeth are smile liabilities that often have been cited as reasons for emotional and behavioral problems.

An unattractive smile is one of the most prominent causes of social pre-judgment. Persons dealing with the public, who require even minimum self esteem, desire natural looking restorations—consequently a nice smile—in order to function normally again.

Traditional Treatment

Traditionally, the most common and economical method of replacing missing teeth has been removable pro-

and bone support. It is not uncommon to find that these appliances cause further deterioration of the mouth.

Newer Method—Fixed Prosthodontics

Over the years, many significant advances have occurred in prosthetic dentistry. Practitioners in this dental specialty now replace missing teeth with techniques and materials that make the new teeth amazingly lifelike, functional and comfortable in the mouth. Fixed prosthodontics is the term applied to this replacement of missing teeth with *non-removable* fixed bridgework. Such treatment is now considered superior to the use of removable partial dentures.

Most patients report that they disdain the use of partial dentures, particularly

treatment provided by the specialty of prosthodontics. Injuries sustained in automobile accidents do not always result in missing teeth. Sometimes, fractured jaws and other dental injuries may require correction.

The bite, as well as the temporomandibular joint (the hinge/joint of the jaw) is frequently affected by accidents. There are many varieties of prosthodontic treatment methods now available to help patients who have suffered these problems as well.

Although prosthodontics requires a great deal of very special scientific training and skill, it is a well developed artistry that gives the important finishing touch to the life-like results. Prosthodontists and their highly trained laboratory technicians have unique materials at their disposal to provide patients with very realistic looking and natural restorations.

The specialty of prosthodontics is essentially the blending of all the characteristics of the "healing arts". Accident patients who suffer oral injuries or disfigurement may never be completely restored to their pre-accident condition. However, only special prosthodontic treatment can provide the patient with a restoration that approaches truly natural teeth.

Conclusion

Medically informed legal counsel representing accident victims can advise their clients of the treatment modalities available for restoring missing and/or damaged teeth. Counsel should recognize the benefits of prosthodontic treatment, and help their clients obtain the superior results and emotional satisfaction that such prosthodontics yields.

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(Dr. Thomas J. Balshi is a Board Certified Prosthodontist who heads a full service dental reconstruction team in Fort Washington, PA. He is clinical associate professor of dentistry at Temple University Dental School.)

those replacing large numbers of missing teeth. Their objection increases when the dentures require large areas of metal or plastic to cover the roof of the mouth, or extend under the tongue. Furthermore, many persons who wear removable dentures find that the unnatural feeling of the appliances affects their speech, as well as their ability to fully enjoy the food they eat.

Accident rehabilitation patients accustomed to wearing a removable partial denture are elated when it is replaced with a non-removable prosthodontic restoration. When such restoration is accomplished, self-confidence is restored as well.

Consider, for example, the case of a lovely young woman in her mid-twenties who sustained a serious facial blow during an automobile accident. The impact resulted in the loss of many upper front teeth. She was treated for immediate life-threatening conditions and recovered, quite nicely, from those injuries.

The patient's family dentist replaced the missing teeth by providing her with a removable partial denture. The patient suffered with this loose fitting, removable appliance for ten years before she learned of prosthodontic specialty care as an alternative form of treatment. The mere possibility of a "permanent" non-removable replacement for her missing teeth gave her new hope.

When the patient's dental history was reviewed, it was noted that she had very strong negative feelings about the removable appliance replacing her missing teeth. This negatively affected her entire life. She had an intense desire to eliminate the removable appliance and the unsightly hooks, clips and clasps which held it loosely in place.

Fixed prosthodontics in the form of crown and bridge treatment enabled this patient to eliminate the removable partial dentures. The prosthodontic treatment created a very natural appearance. This non-removable prosthesis was made of blended tooth-colored porcelains, similar to natural tooth enamel, baked over sturdy gold substructure. The replacement teeth were then cemented securely in place. With modern prosthodontic design, none of the gold reinforcing framework is visible when the patient smiles, laughs or speaks.

Another example of prosthodontic treatment is in the case of an attractive young lady who suffered severe trauma to the upper front teeth as a result of a recent train crash. An emergency "splint" was applied to the loose fractional teeth during the patient's emergency hospital treatment.

Alternately, the porcelain-fused-to-gold non-removable bridge was fabricated and finally cemented permanently in the patient's mouth permitting her to return to normal function.

It should be pointed out also that prolonged litigation was required to compensate for the results of this trauma.

Most patients wearing removable partial dentures can be re-treated with fixed prosthodontics. However, certain bio-

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logical requirements are necessary to properly design and then treat a patient using fixed prosthodontic restoration. A consultation with a prosthodontist would help in determining whether a given individual is a candidate for such care. The names of practitioners who specialize in this form of dentistry can be obtained from: The American College of Prosthodontists, Suite 272 West, 84 N.E. Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78216.

Insurance Influence

Since crown and bridge treatment is clinically more difficult to perform, fixed prosthodontics is more costly than use of removable partial dentures. The difference in cost is not overlooked by insurance carriers, which work diligently to advocate the least costly method of patient care. Thus, insurance companies have applied economic pressures to influence the choice of treatment.

As a result, patients often never realize or are never informed that more

comfortable, functional and cosmetically pleasing alternatives are available.

Why Elect Fixed Prosthodontics?

There are several sound reasons why fixed prosthodontics should be preferred over a removable prosthodontic appliance.

1. The removable appliance utilizing clasps, hooks or wires around remaining natural teeth traditionally has been recognized as a potential agent in the destruction of those natural teeth used for support.

2. Physiologic loading along the long axis of natural teeth is a bio-mechanical principle which should be followed when any kind of prosthetic treatment is provided. Use of the fixed prosthesis adheres particularly well to all the bio-mechanical principles recognized as physiologically acceptable.

3. Unlike removable appliances, which frequently irritate the gum tissues, the fixed prosthesis can be designed to eliminate this problem.

4. In the upper jaw, removable appliances frequently cover all of the roof of the mouth. Conversely, a fixed prosthesis merely replaces missing teeth in the same dimensions in which the teeth were present originally.

5. Cosmetically, the removable appliance frequently reveals the junction between natural teeth and the replacement section. A good fixed prosthesis will make this junction undetectable, and present teeth with a realistic, life-like appearance.

6. A fixed prosthesis fabricated with high quality gold alloys, covered with modern dental porcelains, may provide a restoration with the same texture as life-like feel of natural enamel.

7. The stability of a fixed prosthesis is notably superior to that of a removable appliance when chewing, speaking, laughing or even kissing.

8. Fixed prosthesis preserves the remaining natural teeth in the most acceptable way possible by adhering to sound biologic principles.

Other Prosthodontic Treatment

Use of a fixed dental prosthesis for patients who have lost teeth due to a traumatic injury is only one form of