

Preventative Treatment...

Recently, I had a patient who made an observation that I think applies all of us in some way or another. He had come in to get his teeth cleaned and a comprehensive exam. After a thorough look at his radiographs, an oral and head and neck cancer screening, a gum evaluation, and a TMD screening, we finally took a good look at his teeth. Finally, we began to go over some preventative treatment. His gums were in good shape, but he had some old crowns and silver-mercury fillings that were starting to look suspect. A few of his teeth were also cracked, showing me that they were weakening. We went over the proposed treatment, showing him his x-rays and pictures of his broken down teeth. After going over things, he said to me, "This is why I don't like going to the dentist...I walk in with nothing bothering me and I walk out with a bunch of broken down teeth."

Exactly. I agree one hundred percent. It is frustrating to see and or feel nothing wrong and then find out that things need a little work. I feel the same way when the mechanic at the oil exchange shows me my run down brake fluid. I don't want to spend the money on new fluid, but brakes are a generally important, if sometimes underappreciated, part of my truck. I wouldn't want to drive through the hill country without them.

I recently went to have a physical, a yearly tradition that I seem to attend every thirty months or so. Nothing wrong, no symptoms...I just wanted to get checked out. Routine maintenance, if you will. I got my blood drawn and my labs run to see if the old body was keeping things in balance. Everything looked good, but my blood pressure was a little high at my visit. Anyone who has a one year old and a three year old can probably relate to this problem. Add to that the five cups of coffee that I had watching the sun rise before my appointment and Doctor Frederick could certainly understand the hypertension. Still, I got a list of the things that I need to do...eat right, drink less caffeine, exercise...we all know what we are supposed to do to stay healthy. The hard part is doing it.

So what happens if I go back to my next physical and I still have high blood pressure? More than likely, I get to start taking a drug that keeps things in check. By going to the doctor, I have asked and entrusted him to prevent my disease, in this case high blood pressure. If he ignored my symptoms, even though they do not cause me any pain, I'd be worried. That's the way prevention works.

Most dentists would much rather prevent broken teeth than try to fix them later with more complicated, i.e. expensive, treatment down the road. A crown today often prevents a root canal or lost tooth later. If I see a tooth that is suspect, it is my job to let my patients know. It is my patient's choice to treat the tooth now, preventatively, or try to wait and see what happens. My feelings are the same either way...let us know when dentistry fits into your life. We'll be here. All we can do is educate.

Nowadays, life is so complicated that none of us can really know it all. We have to find people we trust to help us make the right decisions. Healthcare is no exception. My hope is that you may all find doctors who care and who you can trust.

Until next time, keep smiling.

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