

As Americans, we have the reputation for always being in a hurry. We want what we want, and we want it now. From hamburgers to health-care, our impatient nature drives industries and generates incentives for the “quickest fix.” The interesting thing about this “now notion” is that we are led to believe that this trend is positive. And, that it is universal among professions.



Take dentistry for example, we have all seen the commercials for a “quick fix” dental approach. Full mouth dental implants done in a day or porcelain crowns seated in an hour, these companies would like you to believe the faster your mouth is restored the better. Why take the time to get to know your doctor or allow your doctor to get to know you? Dental or medical care is “a one size fits all right?”

Wrong.

The truth is that diagnosis takes time and individualized care should trump all! Doctors should demand the opportunity to know their patients and understand their unique needs. Medical decisions are as complicated as the people who need them so why not dedicate the time? Just last week, I saw a patient referred to me by her physician for facial pain. She and her husband drove a little over 3 hours in hopes of a solution to her suffering. The first 30 minutes of her appointment we sat together and talked. Let me say that again...for approximately 30 minutes, she talked and I listened. I needed to hear her story like how she described her four failed surgeries in the last 6 months to understand if and how I could help.

What bothers me most about situations like this one is the missed opportunity to be a positive impact on this woman’s life. Four surgeries successful by “medical standards” but a failure to her. She is still in pain. How can this be?

As doctors, I argue that it is our responsibility to seek solutions for our patients especially when their circumstances or symptoms fall outside the norm? And, when society, insurance companies or advertisers try to influence our practice philosophies, is it not our job to push back?

Recently, I spoke to an internal medicine physician about a sleep study I had completed for a long standing patient in my practice. With a board certification from the American Academy of Craniofacial Dental Sleep Medicine, it is not uncommon that I identify individuals with the possible risk of Sleep Apnea, send them home with my sleep screening equipment and discuss the results with his or her physician. On this particular day, I thanked her MD for taking my call and began to describe my opinion on how to help her get better. I reviewed the findings of the study, described her history of bruxism and jaw joint problems as well as the presentation of her oral airway. I then asked him for his thoughts. And I quote, “my thoughts are dictated by the insurance company. I recommend what they will pay for.”

Gulp. Really?

Call me old fashioned or call me crazy, but I did not commit to four years of dental school and over 500 hours of post-doctorate education to work for an insurance company. My intent and my passion is to help my patients feel better in a time frame that is reasonable for his or her specific situation and individualized needs. Yes, this type of practice requires persistence and patience at times. It requires dedication and diligence to “swim upstream”. But at the end of the day, when you witness your patient feeling better and living life, trust me, the struggle is worth it!

