

## A Season of Precaution

**A**s this is being written, winter is on its way. People in the northern hemisphere are awaiting a lasting snowfall, physically removed from the anthrax scares occurring on and around the United States' East Coast.

I grew up in farm country, and anthrax was around but never the cause for much alarm. That was, of course, before "weapon-grade" diseases were a reality. In those days you literally had to work at it to contract the disease, unlike present-day forms, which have spread widely from a few malicious sources.

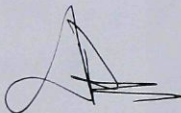
To my patients and staff, to help ease their worry about possible exposure to anthrax, I have related that this disease has been around for a long time; we know how to treat it, and treatment is very effective. Yes, there have been people who have died from inhaling the spores, and the problem can be very serious. However, if the disease is diagnosed early and treated properly, cure is very likely.

I have counseled my patients to get the "flu" shot this winter, and then, if they experienced flu-like symptoms, to seek medical attention quickly. This could lead to early diagnosis and appropriate treatment if they had been exposed. While this may result in some people being prescribed antibiotics inappropriately, resulting in new resistant organisms, I believe that with careful selection of patients and medications, the good will outweigh the harm.

A lot of mail from all over the world is received in my office, and while I know of no reason why I would ever be a target, I have suggested precautions for my staff's protection. I don't think doing so was unwarranted, and besides, it has left me with the feeling that I have done what I can to protect these dedicated people.

For those staff members who come into direct contact with patients, I have let them know that this disease does not spread from person to person. In addition, the universal precautions that we already take go a long way to making us less likely to contract any of the diseases that our patients may bring into the office.

It is my hope that when you read this in the new year, with spring approaching, the world is a safer, more peaceful place.



Thomas G. Wilson, DDS  
**Editor-in-Chief**