

Excellence Is Its Own Reward

I was taught that “anything worth doing is worth doing well.” I am very thankful my parents encouraged me to take pride in a job well done. The work ethic you have will be reflected in your dentistry and in the way you choose to practice.

Unfortunately, based on observation, mediocrity seems to be the standard of care in dentistry and is epitomized by the high-volume practice. Here, success is viewed only in terms of the number of patients treated per day and how many units can be produced on a daily basis. This production style of practice does not allow the time to pursue excellence in dentistry, but rather, chains it to mediocrity.

In a practice based upon mass production dentistry, there is always a price to pay in achieving the goal of high production. It usually is accomplished by having much shorter patient appointments, delegating as many procedures as legally possible, drastically reducing the high overhead costs by using cheaper products and lower quality labs, and reducing the time a patient spends directly with the doctor.

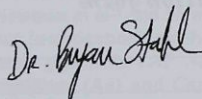
One frequently will hear doctors who practice in a manufacturing style say they are so busy that they don't have time to spend with their patients. Stop for a moment and really think about that statement. It is very disconcerting when you realize its full implications. But we seem to have accepted without challenge, mass production medicine. It truly has become the norm in medicine today. These dentists apparently have the mindset that patients do not desire or are not willing to pay for optimal care. Perhaps, they are hiding behind insurance limitations as the reason to not practice excellent dentistry. Poor office management systems can contribute to missed opportunities to do our best work. There are myriad reasons for not consistently doing excellent dentistry. With some searching, we will find that many of these “reasons” are rationalizations used to justify mediocrity.

Are you deeply satisfied when you have finished a margin to imperception or expertly sutured a flap? Is your conscience satisfied when you have made a challenging diagnosis, which perhaps eluded others,

or adjusted an occlusion for a lifetime of stability? Does your self-respect grow when you have made excellent radiographs, or restored a patient's mouth and seen them maintain optimal health for years? Do you have inner satisfaction when you have listened with true compassion to a hurting patient? Are you getting to know your patients instead of seeing them as a unit of production on an overbooked, hectic schedule? Do you have a sense of pride in a job well done after polishing a gold inlay to perfection, or taking the time to do a thorough evaluation?

Our practices reflect the choices we make on a daily basis. Granted, there are challenges to meet in developing a dental practice with excellence as its foundation. The success is sweet when we have obtained the excellence we had as our goal. The fact remains, there are few long-term benefits to the doctors or patients in slipshod practices. It may be tempting to dismiss me as an ivory-towered idealist in an effort to ease your own conscience, but I urge you to consider the following questions. Where is your practice in the pursuit of excellence? What is needed to move your practice towards excellence? Are you tired of being on the dental production treadmill? Are you tired of fighting with patients and insurance companies?

There is another way to practice dentistry. I have chosen to fight the tide in dentistry and build a low-volume, patient-centered practice. I would love to discuss with you the challenges found in building a practice based on excellence. I still believe that excellence is its own reward.



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Dr Stahl has been in solo practice for the past 15 years. His general dentistry practice in Barrington, Illinois, is committed to providing optimal care in a low-volume, patient-centered environment. He has a special interest in and studies ethics in dentistry and medicine. Dr Stahl is an alumnus of The Pankey Institute for Advanced Dental Education in Key Biscayne, Florida. He can be reached at (847) 842-7788 or via fax at (847) 842-9964.