

## THE PATIENT KNOWS

By Dr. Dave Cutts DDS

The purpose of this letter is to describe the core values that makes our office what it is for, every prospective doctor or staff member who is looking to join us. I will also answer the question that usually comes next which is, "Is it the right fit for me?"

Adult Dentistry is its own thing and is not like any other "practice model" I have run across in 37 years as a dentist. It is not just "geriatric" dentistry-although it may sound like that since we specialize in 50 and over patients.

You could call it, "integrative dentistry" since it requires a combination of advanced

prosthetic, surgical, periodontal, and endodontic skills.

But that would be like calling a piece of art some canvas and paint.

It is much, much more than that.

### FINDING OUT “THE PATIENT KNOWS”

The Vision actually took shape for me around 2005 as I listened to patient after patient tell me their story. These were patients with complex problems who had been undertreated, overtreated, and yes, mistreated. As I listened, I saw the tears in their eyes. Tears of frustration, anger, fear, and the worst of them all-the tears of betrayal.

As I looked into their faces, I saw the faces of my mother, my aunts, my uncles. These were older relatives that I loved the most, and the people I would be crushed by the most, if I ever failed them. As I began to treat more and more of these mature, beautiful people a few other things came to view.

I first realized that there was a shocking void in our profession. It seemed as if we had lost our own souls. And yes, it felt like I had too at times. I had listened to too many “consultants” talk about ‘production’ and ‘targets’ instead of hearts and lives. I had gone to too many seminars on “selling” and doing crown preps in four minutes. I attended dental school reunions where classmates brought-out pictures of their

twin-engines airplanes and new estate homes as if they were the most valuable things in their lives. And I thought, 'Is this what it's all about?'

So, I sat and listened as hundreds and hundreds of new patients slowly opened-up and revealed their fears, and a truth that was so stunning that, at first I could barely say it out loud, much less think it.

*They knew it all.*

They saw right through us when we told them they had an old filling that now needed a crown even though they had no symptoms or decay.

We were fooling only ourselves when we talked about "pockets" and deep cleaning when there were 4 and 5mm depths.

People have “gut” feelings. And the internet. They saw our real motivation when we earnestly told them they needed a bridge NOW to replace that missing lower left first molar.(it had been gone for 20 years!)

They even gave us chances at redemption by asking sensible questions like, “can’t I just have a filling rather than a crown?” Or, “do I really need this today?”

And then there was the dreaded “Laundry List of Recommendations”.(their exact words). We were fooling no one with our comprehensive examinations and long-winded “patient educations”, that were really attempts to sell treatment.

Why?

Because they knew.

And so, with that exact phrase,  
“Adult Dentistry” was born.

“THE PATIENT KNOWS”

Knows What?

***Everything.***

I have seen hundreds of doctors and staff  
and even patients protest this because they  
hope it isn't true.

Why? Because doctors know they will have  
to change the way they handle their patient  
relationships.(or in the case of the patient,  
they will have to take responsibility for both  
the shape their mouth is in, and also the  
success of the treatment.)

Also, doctors are afraid their income will  
drop. Not realizing that **not** owning-up to  
this is WHY their income HAS dropped.(or

never reached-up to prosperous levels in the FIRST place!)

So, I stopped selling, stopped over-explaining and just got down and real with every patient. My new patient interviews became my favorite part of the day. More and more I became known for, “telling it straight”. I had the pleasure of telling hundreds of second-opinion patients that they did NOT need the 10,000, 15,000, and 20,000 dollars of work “right now.” (then again many did) I became skillful at explaining that, no, these other doctors we NOT all crooks. They just were “going by the book they were taught”. (sure, some were pushing it.)

What came next was so simple, so pure, so basic that I still shake my head at how this could have been overlooked for so long.

PATIENTS ARE JUST LOOKING FOR  
SOMEONE THEY CAN TRUST.

Once I realized this fully, I made this my sacred mission, the Holy Grail, of my practice. ( I thought I already *was* doing this.)

So, the practice motto became;

*Do anything and everything necessary to honor the trust that has been given.*

Well first off, that meant NO "SELLING"!

Just straight-up conversations about  
CHOICES.

(I see nationally-known consultants who  
PREACH "do not give the patient choices,



YOU are the doctor, they are in your office to hear what YOU recommend. Giving choices only confuses them....”)

Bull crap.

I could write a book on this part alone and maybe I will.....in another time and place.

Secondly, DELIVER THE GOODS.

Simply put, there is no substitute for flat-out excellent dentistry.

It takes heart AND great clinical DELIVERY to gain and keep trust.

So there were the first two pieces of the puzzle;

1) the “heart” and,

2) the “Deliver the Goods” part of this evolving picture that would become Adult Dentistry.

Next I was rudely awakened to the fact that even with advanced oral surgery training, specialized training in full mouth reconstruction, and 25,000 IV and Oral sedation and General Anesthesia cases under my belt, I needed to UP my clinical game to a whole new level. And that was *with* 25 years experience of high-production dentistry.

I won't go through all of the advanced All-on-Four implant surgery and prosthetic training I did. All of the bone-grafting. All of the humbling experiences of sitting at the feet of master laboratory technicians and other doctors. Because honestly, that's just the way it is, and many doctors have done this. Or should.

## ADULTS 50+ HAVE STUFF GOING ON!

At that time as I was upping my clinical game, I realized something that I had brushed-over about my 50+ patients.

They had health issues that significantly affected how their dental treatment was planned, and safely carried-out.

Real and serious issues. Heart, stroke, kidney, breathing problems, arthritis, auto-immune, dementia, medications, blood thinners, cancer, extended and multiple hospitalizations and yes, loneliness and depression.

These problems were such a daily part of their lives that I found myself forced to become more involved with medical evaluation and risk-assessment than I had ever dreamed. And, yes, that involved still

MORE advanced training, this time in medical assessment and emergency medicine. And along with that came the necessity to get on the phone with MDs on a regular basis and know what I was talking about, and what THEY were talking about.

So, this is all to say one thing;

**ADULT DENTISTRY IS ITS OWN SPECIALTY.**

I would go so far as saying it requires every bit as much a dedicated residency program as any of the other recognized specialties. Especially since it **INCLUDES** a number of them within this **ONE** specialty.

The closest thing to this now is our mentorship training program here at The Center for Adult Dentistry.

I'll cap this section with a comment on the business plan aspect of this, and then my favorite--the heart part of it.

First the business part;

I have been asked, "Why are you doing all of this when you could cash-in and retire?"

That's a fair question for most people.

The answer is that I am not most people.

First, I am driven to do great things.

I actually get my most satisfaction when helping other people succeed.

And I am happiest when I am producing at a high level. The more the better.

As an example, probably my proudest business accomplishment of the past 18

months has been hiring a quiet, shy 19 year-old right out assisting school and turning her into a top-notch assistant. And more than that; my *head* assistant who is paid more than probably any dental assistant in Temecula. She and I alone have out-performed entire dental groups in the past four months.

I am proud that I recognized intelligence where other saw shyness; that I recognized and rewarded hard work where other offices blocked her way with assistants who were less motivated, and felt entitled to their pay and position.

Most of all she is a jewel of a person who loves my patients.