

Risk Management and Failure to Diagnose

By: Mary Fisher-Day

Your Patients have chosen to trust you with their dental care. What they want is your expertise and they expect to be given treatment options without prejudice. If you fail to present a patient with the best option for dental care, for any reason, you're doing them a disservice. You're doing yourself a disservice, as well, because it can come back to bite you.

Most people have financial concerns, but let me assure you, your patients want a dentist who diagnoses based on needed treatment. As a consultant, I prefer dentists not know, off the top of their head, what their fees are. This reduces the chance of 'diagnosis by check book'. You should treat each of your patients as if they were a member of your family. Diagnose the same way. You would want a member of your family to have the opportunity to choose the best course of treatment, wouldn't you?

As you may know, failure to diagnose and treat periodontal disease is the number one cause of dental malpractice lawsuits today. Failure to diagnose Oral Cancer is a close second. Periodontal disease is connected to many medical conditions and dental care providers cannot afford to 'watch it'. It is important that all conversations pertaining to dental care be documented. If you fail to document, it could be assumed you fail to diagnose.

There are so many ways to get this right. First, always give your patients the best treatment options. Second, make sure they have financing options. Care Credit and Capital One have great patient financing services. They are patient friendly and best of all, you get your money at time of treatment. Third, don't assume your patient can't afford your treatment plan. Fourth, if it's what your patient needs, it's your responsibility to recommend it. So, just do it and make sure it's documented. I can't say that enough. Document...document...document...