

PARTNERSHIP IN DISCOVERY AND CO-DIAGNOSIS

By

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Development of a partnership in discovery and co-diagnosis with your patient enables the patient to discover their own desires, as opposed to “dental experts” telling them what they *need*.

Patients must desire health. It cannot be forced upon them. The good news is that the vast majority of our patients really do desire and value health.

Our role is to be a facilitator of discovery. It is the patient’s job to decide what level of health they choose for themselves. The most eloquent verbal, communication, and persuasive skills on our part *are no substitute* for a genuine desire on the patient’s part for the services we provide. A partnership is formed when they become a participant in the discovery and co-diagnosis and develop ownership related to their own dental health.

Partnership in discovery and co-diagnosis is the process by which:

- ◆ The patient discovers for him/herself what disease look and feels like and comparisons of health versus disease are discovered in his/her own mouth
- ◆ Determinations are made as to whether the patient *desires* optimal periodontal, restorative or aesthetic treatment and a time-line to proceed with treatment
- ◆ The patient understands the financial commitment for treatment and makes necessary arrangements to assume responsibility beyond insurance assistance
- ◆ The patient takes responsibility for daily disease control and maintenance of health
- ◆ The patient takes responsibility for complying with recommended intervals for regular dental hygiene care

We can involve the patient in this partnership physically as they take part in the discovery and co-diagnosis of what is happening in their own mouths. We involve them intellectually, as they carefully consider advantages and disadvantages of pursuing optimal periodontal, restorative and aesthetic health and they take ownership for their decisions. Emotionally, the patient becomes a partner, as they truly desire what we provide, and take necessary steps to obtain it.

The following are effective ways we can involve the patient in a partnership of discovery and co-diagnosis:

1. Ask open-ended questions to discover patient’s values
2. Use active listening skills to learn what is really important to the patient
3. Relate medical history and stress levels to oral health
4. Utilize the Intra-oral camera to educate, motivate and show comparisons
5. Offer computer imaging for aesthetic treatment
6. Allow the patient to demonstrate their current oral hygiene habits and evaluate effectiveness together
7. Disrupt bacteria in the sulcus and evaluate tissue response together
8. Explain what pocket depths mean
9. Show patients micro-fractures in their enamel, worn or defective restorations
10. Relate occlusal function to long-term health and aesthetics
11. Use visual aids to replace wordy descriptions

12. Use plaque-disclosing and, or caries-detection devices
13. Use current radiographs as visual aids to demonstrate changes in bone density
14. Educate patients regarding treatment options, benefits of treatment, consequences of non-treatment, and possible risks
15. Invite patient's questions and respond factually, not defensively
16. Build value for treatment through personal testimonials, when applicable
17. Record patient's responses to treatment possibilities following discussions
18. Educate patients on the latest research related to periodontal and systemic health
19. Invite patients to return for comprehensive exams when more diagnostic data, or more time is required to adequately treatment plan and answer questions
20. Give patients written information or brochures to supplement discussions
21. Demonstrate genuine concern for all patients through *ultra* service everyday
22. Ask patients routinely how you can best meet their expectations
23. Strive to make patients *feel understood*
24. Honor the patient's time commitment by mastering time management in the practice
25. Celebrate masterpiece aesthetic results with the patient and the entire team

While clinical diagnosis is a critical element for achieving optimal clinical results, it is imperative that we not stop at the point of diagnosis, but rather be deliberate about involving the patient in their own discovery.

Asking questions that guide the patient toward discovery and desiring optimal outcomes can assist us in the partnership process as well. For example:

"Mrs. Jones, I see you have many teeth that have similar restorations to this tooth that has now become sensitive. How long have these other restorations been in your mouth?"

Do you know why you originally needed so many restorations?

How do you feel about the possibility of restoring your teeth with materials that can add strength to the remaining tooth structure?"

"Mr. Brown, would you say that outward appearance and overall image is important to you in your profession?"

Tell me what you notice about others when they smile.

What do you notice about your own smile when you see a picture of yourself?

Let's explore some options together of ways to enhance a person's smile...some of these options have dramatic results!"

"Ms. Smith, I am concerned about the signs of active disease we see in your mouth today. Just as early detection and early treatment are critical to getting high blood pressure under control, the same approach is critical to stopping a progression of periodontal disease. Would you like to know more about how periodontal health can affect a person's overall health?"

"What is your greatest concern related to having this treatment?"

Most of us in the dental profession are here because we care about assisting others with achieving health. However, it is tragic if our patients lack the desire and motivation to take advantage of what can assist them in restoring teeth to ideal form and function, getting periodontal disease under control, and creating dramatic, beautiful smiles! Creating a partnership in discovery and co-diagnosis opens the door for patients to choose optimal dental health for themselves.

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