

# A caring profession

Michael Sultan discusses attitudes towards holistic dentistry.

What is your New Year's resolution? Mine is to be more open minded – particularly in terms of the things I read about our profession. As we all know, there are so many new techniques and schools of thought appearing on our professional radars nowadays and simply taking no notice of them would be obtuse. But even



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with all of this in mind, I still do come across certain articles that really test my resolve.

The most recent was a piece that was written to promote the work of holistic dentists and, while I am fully supportive of any dental professional who strives to improve their patients' general health through their work, I found the particular attitude on display in this piece both cynical and unwarranted.

Indeed, it is an attitude I am seeing more and more often in the alternative press – how holistic or homeopathic dentists are the only ones in the profession who truly treat their patients as a whole, not just a set of disembodied teeth.

Admittedly, when I'm working and the patient is dozing off in the chair and I've got my microscope on and all I can see is the canal, it's easy to get a little bit lost in the treatment. Of

course, I've never completely forgotten that there is a person attached to the tooth, but sometimes (and I am sure that many of you are exactly the same) I can become so absorbed in what I am doing that the tooth is all I see.

But beyond the treatment, this is by no means the case. Dentists in this country are part of a caring, protecting profession and we are all aware of the links between oral health and general health. We always discuss dietary habits with our patients, explain how stress and anxiety may manifest in dental conditions such as bruxism or TMJ disorders.

That holistic dentists would try to monopolise this aspect of the responsibility all dental practitioners have to their patients is simply a cynical marketing tactic – and it is fundamentally inaccurate.

What's worse is the attitudes many

alternative practitioners have to the materials and techniques the majority of modern professionals use on a daily basis. In particular, holistic dentistry attacks amalgams, portraying them as irredeemably toxic, or fluoridated water as an institutionalised evil.

For those professionals who can remember back to when white filling materials were first being used, around 30 years ago, we can see that the alternative products being used in lieu of the tried and tested ones were simply ineffectual. White filling materials were very technique sensitive and the bond if it was ever there often was lost. As an endodontist, I knew that teeth restored with this material would ultimately fail and we would have to complete root canal treatments anyway. The point is, traditional filling materials may come with some risk, but that risk has been very carefully balanced against the known benefits – and it seems counterproductive to ignore these benefits now.

The same is true of fluoridated water – we are all aware of the advantages of fluoride. It has, quite simply, eliminated the wholesale removal of teeth. We need fluoride in our water and to listen to a select few who consistently depend on horror stories and limited fact to market themselves competitively is detrimental to patients as well as the profession.

Indeed, the dental profession must constantly defend itself from external criticism and fear mongering – having to start defending from the same from within is simply backwards and ultimately damaging to everyone.

The bottom line is that the dental profession in this country today is incredibly caring – all practitioners recognise their responsibilities to the whole patient, not just their mouths and treat accordingly.

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