

All The Right Moves!

By Risa Simon, cmc

Over 45 years ago, it was no surprise to witness a multitude of musculoskeletal disorders in the dental profession. After all, dentists shared space with barbers, as they provided services on their feet all day. Paradoxically, in the mid 50's, (even after the evolution of sit-down dentistry became the standard of care), **musculoskeletal** stress factors continued to develop.

To make matters worse, organized dentistry continued to ignore the scientific evidence that linked musculoskeletal disorders to poor postures and work habits. Regrettably, this encouraged dental professionals to look the other way, as the numbers of those inflicted seem to multiply.

In fact, awareness only increased when dentists, hygienists and assistants, personally experienced chronic pain, which then forced them to pay attention! This led to university studies, which revealed musculoskeletal stress to be a much bigger problem than anyone was willing to admit. Take a good look at the statistics from a study out of British Columbia, Vancouver, to see if you'd contribute to these percentages:

- 61 %** neck pain
- 51%** lower back pain
- 44 %** shoulder pain
- 43%** upper back pain
- 38 %** hand pain
- 30%** mid back pain
- 14%** arm pain
- 10%** leg pain

This study also revealed that dentists actually experienced *less* pain when they understood how to optimize their treatment room equipment, and properly use surgical magnification. This same study also found dentists who practiced **four-handed dentistry** also had much **less shoulder pain!**

Adjunctive studies also proved that a fully trained chairside assistant could potentially **increase the doctor's level of productivity up to 100%** - while **significantly reducing operator stress** and **improving the quality of care provided.**

Yet, while these somewhat simple modes of operation are readily available, most clinicians take the path of least resistance, which is to do nothing but proclaim, "*pain and suffering are a 'packaged deal' in dentistry, that comes with the territory*" - and, if you believe that, *indeed it will!*

Moreover, physicians, chiropractors and even physical therapists ignorantly reinforced these assumptions, by stating that pain was a byproduct of the dental profession. Shamefully though, as they promoted their services to relieve the pain, the relief was only temporary.

While holding good intentions, most healthcare professionals don't have enough information about dental habits to "crack the mold". Simply put, **they've been trained to treat the symptoms; not to diagnose and correct problematic 'habits' that cause the symptoms in the first place!**

Pain can be akin to '**Morris Code**,' in that it signals the body to alert us that a problem exists. However, when we ignore the message structural changes can occur, which can end up damaging tissue and cause varied degrees of musculoskeletal disease over time. **If intervention efforts are not employed quickly (to reduce inflammation) healing will not occur at the initial stage of soft tissue damage, which then causes chronic disease to develop.**

Combine these unknown risks with the "fuzzy math" we've been told are "**associated costs**" in developing an ergonomic program - *and it's no wonder our professions waits until they are literally forced to hang-up their handpiece, prophylaxis jet or suction tip for the very last time before action is taken.*

The sad truth is that no one even talks about the hidden gem of increased revenue, for **ergonomics is as much about achieving optimal levels of efficiency, as it is about supporting musculoskeletal health - if not more!**

Ironically, if you think you can't afford to buy a telephone headset for your appointment coordinator, a new stool for your assistant, or surgical magnification for yourself (or hygienist); **the inefficiencies you continue to create, will literally end-up costing you 10x's more in lost opportunity!**

Truth be known, over 85% of what's called for here is behaviorally modifiable. It boils down to changing habits - poor work habits to be exact. The good news is that changing habits (even though they take time to 're-wire' themselves) - are free for the asking!

The choice is yours. You have the power to be *proactive*. You can either act now, or pay later. Stop looking the other way and start listening to what your body is telling you. Hear the cry of those clinicians who were forced to leave the field, who continue to remind us that, "*the pain of work restriction (and loss of income) are far greater than the pain suffered from the musculoskeletal disorder itself!*" **Embrace an ergonomic philosophy as if your life depended on it. At the very least, your level of efficiency and profitability does!**



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For more information on her ergonomic efficiency book "**All The Right Moves**" her *chairside efficiency* DVD "**Optimizing Team Performance**", or her new motivational book "**TeamFirst™!**":
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