

## A Zero Sum Game?

Recent Centers for Disease Control studies have identified the percentage breakdown of various factors that determine a person's health:

Personal Choices – 53%

Environment – 19%

Genetics – 18 %

Doctor Recommendations – 10%

It is interesting to see that Doctor Recommendations is the bottom of the list. Perhaps people are realizing that a doctors' recommendation may not be the healthiest of choices, such as relying solely on medications such as statins to reduce cholesterol or diuretics to lower blood pressure. I believe this is why approximately two thirds of the U.S. population is seeking alternate forms of health care. Since personal choice has risen to the top of the list, it is vitally important that people have access to proper information so they can make the right choices. In today's information age, I see a trend in my new patients being more informed about health than in the past. This I like, as it means that they are interested in their health, which is a crucial element in a quest for optimum dental health. However, I also see some patients that have found and believe in information accessed on the internet, some of which could actually be harmful to their health. So, I consider it my job as their dentist to assist them in these educational efforts. After 40 years of being a teacher of dentistry as well as a continual student, I have a good idea of what works and what doesn't. In other words, those people that make up the 53% 'Personal Choices' category need to be supported by valid and appropriate information from which to make proper health choices.

The very foundation of my Dental Wellness Center is based on patient education. Patients in my Wellness Center include so many that have had well over 30 years of continued good oral health, people who originally were in poor oral health with gum disease, missing teeth, migraines, head and neck pain, etc. Much of this success has to do with empowering the patient with information about their oral health and teaching them the habits for maintaining good oral health. It has been said that "rich people can't buy health and poor people can't have it given to them." I believe that true health is a process that starts with developing a trusting relationship, having as much to do with the patient's interest in becoming healthy as that of the doctor. I have a formula regarding health: *The state of health of a patient is directly proportional to their desire to become healthy and inversely proportional to the interest of the doctor in helping them get there.* In other words, if the doctor's interest in having the patient become healthy is more than that of the patient, the equation is compromised. Reciprocally, if the patients' interest in becoming healthy is greater than that of the doctor, the same compromise will occur. In fact, it really becomes a 'zero sum game,' meaning that both the patient and the doctor need to have an equal interest in the patients' health for there to be a truly successful outcome.

This is why my initial interview with new patients is so important. It allows for a discussion about mutual roles of the doctor/patient relationship in attaining optimal oral health and how this relates to other bodily systems. "How healthy do you really want to become?" is the central question from which a mutual game plan can be developed. After these mutual roles are determined and agreed upon, the next step is to perform a proper assessment. With every patient of my Dental Wellness Center, two very important dental health areas are assessed:

## I – PERIODONTAL (GUM) HEALTH.

There are various stages of periodontal disease. Its relationship to bodily health continues to be supported almost daily by mounting research data. The same blood that goes through your gums goes through your entire body, including the heart. This fact certainly magnifies the need towards developing healthy gums. Keeping your teeth and gums healthy can increase life expectancy by 10 years or more. This is especially true for patients that are at increased risk of a heart attack, diabetes or are pregnant. Researchers have discovered an important connection between periodontal disease and heart disease, stroke, diabetes, pre-term low birth weight babies, cancers, Alzheimer's, respiratory disease, kidney disease and others. The oral systemic link between periodontal and general health remains very strong. The treatment of periodontal disease is influenced by several factors:

1. Patient attitude/interest in becoming healthy
2. General health
3. Actual stage of the disease
4. Oral bacterial plaque and its activity level
5. Genetic predisposition

Our assessment takes all of the above factors into consideration:

1. Patient attitude/interest
  - This is determined in the beginning interview appointment. Read “The First Appointment” and “The Dentist Interview” on our website, [www.rpmdentistry.com](http://www.rpmdentistry.com).
2. General health
  - Review of patient medical and dental history
  - Review of patient’s family dental and health history
3. Actual stage of the disease
  - Measurement of the gum pockets and quantifying the areas that bleed when measured. We have a computerized gum measurement device that records and stores these values within your records. It delivers the same pressure (15 grams) at each gum measuring site for accuracy and comfort.
4. Oral bacterial type and activity - Certain anaerobic (those not needing oxygen) oral plaque bacteria have been found in the inner lining of body and heart blood vessels.
  - BANA test – Of the 500 or so different bacteria types found in the mouth, 11 of them (all anaerobic) are quite unhealthy and dangerous not only for the gums, but systemically as well. If someone has bleeding upon gum measuring, the BANA test is done to see if 3 of the worst types of the 11 are present. We also perform another bacterial test (Periodontal Pathogen Test) to determine whether any other of the 11 dangerous bacterial types are present.
  - Phase microscopic plaque sample analysis. This shows bacteria types and amounts, as well as their activity level.
5. Genetic predisposition
  - We use the Periodontal Susceptibility test in severe cases of periodontal disease. It measures the presence of IL- $\beta$ , which, if present, results in an exaggerated response to oral bacteria, thereby predisposing a person to develop severe chronic periodontal disease.

- Detailed review of patient's family dental and health history.

## II – FUNCTIONAL HEALTH OF THE CHEWING SYSTEM

This assessment is overlooked in most traditional dental practices. It is the manner in which the teeth of the upper and lower jaws relate to each other, and their functional relationship with the jaw joints (TMJ's) and surrounding structures, i.e., muscles, ligaments, nerves and blood vessels. An understanding of how a healthy oral system appears and functions compared to those with signs and symptoms such as teeth wear, migraines, head and neck pain, vertigo (balance problems) and tinnitus (ringing in the ears) is key. The Dental Wellness Center uses the principles of Bioesthetics (read "Cosmetics and Bioesthetics" on our website, [www.rpmdentistry.com](http://www.rpmdentistry.com).) in the diagnosis and treatment of these problems. As a dentist trained in Bioesthetics, I understand how a healthy mouth looks and functions and through this knowledge can assist my patients to develop healthy function and appearance using the healthy model as the guideline, or template.

The Dental Wellness Center offers the most comprehensive array of services as it looks at the bigger picture of the mouth body connection through periodontal health assessment along with Bioesthetic evaluation with an emphasis on patient education. Together we can meet your dental needs so that you can enjoy better dental and overall health for many years to come.