

# Shattering a Myth:

## Linking Physical and Dental Health

**D**r. C. Michael Willock, one of the area's leading holistic dentists, is rightly proud of a certificate he has just received (*see photo*) for completing a 83-hour post-graduate course in environmental medicine for the health care professional.

Dr. Willock spent many hours on airplanes over the past year to complete the course requirements at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

"Of particularly great value to all of us in the course was the bringing together of physicians and dentists," notes Dr. Willock. "We have a lot of common interests that are too often not understood or acknowledged. Dr. Reinhold Voll of Germany concluded after years of study that 80 to 90 percent of systemic health problems are either caused by, or influenced by the oral cavity—the teeth, tonsils, and sinuses. Clearly, contrary to common beliefs, there is a powerful connection between overall physical health and oral health.

"So dentists and physicians have a great deal to learn from one another. The course on environmental medicine had a strong focus on toxicology. It was an amazing, eye-opening

experience to gain understanding of the depth and vastness of the toxic substances that invade all parts of our lives.

"In this course, we focused on an array of related topics: outdoor and indoor air pollution, food pollution, genetic polymorphism, the role of nutrients and bio-transformation, the natural history of environmental illnesses, chemical sensitivities, and the impact of such heavy metals as mercury and nickel and cadmium—metals commonly used in dentistry.

"There was also great emphasis on neurotoxicity, endocrine toxicity, the effect of specific compounds on the immune system, and—of great importance—effective methods to detoxify the body."

### EXPOSURE TO TOXINS

As a dentist, Dr. Willock notes, "I am exposed to heavy metals every day, especially when I engage—as I do with increasing frequency—in the removal of mercury amalgam fillings. And so I need to be vigilant in these procedures, for me and my staff, which includes supplementation and the use of a far infrared sauna, and special equipment as needed. I often refer patients to a book, *Detox or Die*, by Sherry Rogers, MD, who is generally

recognized as an expert on detoxification."

Dr. Willock notes that "I often see patients in my practice who not only have dental needs, but also have systemic health issues. Based on the knowledge I'm acquiring, I can guide them to physicians who have the understanding to test for high toxic levels. There's always a good reason why the body gets sick—it never does so capriciously—but often illness defies a label, and thus it becomes difficult to treat in traditional ways. Fibromyalgia is a classic example of such an illness.

"In this course in environmental medicine, I learned that there are disease-provoking toxins everywhere. One of the critically important sources of toxins is the mercury in amalgam tooth fillings, and rarely a day goes by that I'm not asked by a patient to remove these fillings. Often the result is a noticeable improvement in health.

"While I need to rely on the expertise of physicians to unmask systemic problems related to toxicity, one thing I often do with my patients is talk about nutrition. I see a great many dental and health issues that are related to poor habits of diet. One of the major parts of the toxicology course I've completed was devoted to understanding how good nutri-

tion and supplementation can power up our cells. And so I'm gaining more expertise in the areas of nutrition and supplementation that I am delighted to share with my patients."

### MORE ABOUT MERCURY

Dr. Willock has prepared a detailed, illustrated, 11-page patient education paper offering a brief overview of the effects of dental amalgam on the teeth and body—a primer of value to all.

He notes that "one of the main problems with amalgam fillings is that mercury amalgam cracks and splits teeth as it heats up and cools down from eating hot and cold foods. When it gets hot from eating hot foods, it expands nearly three times as fast as natural tooth structure and places great stress on a tooth, acting like a wedge, and cracks it."

When the tooth cools down or is chilled by a cold drink "it contracts faster than the natural tooth structure and a small gap opens up at the margins of the restoration and leakage occurs. Bacteria enter between the tooth and the restoration. When the tooth warms back up to body temperature, the gap closes and 'seals in' whatever happened to be in the patient's mouth and saliva at the time."

A basic problem is that amalgam fillings do not bond to the tooth, Dr. Willock explains. "When mercury amalgam is first placed, it is packed into the cavity preparation in a flexible plastic form and soon turns very hard. And while it is hard and adds strength to the tooth, it begins to leak shortly afterward—due to thermal expansion and contraction—because it is not bonded to the tooth and does not seal it. In essence it is just a tight 'press fit.'" There are a host of new, safe composite materials now available for the restoration of teeth in need, he says.

He notes that dental amalgam is typically a 50-50 mix of mercury and silver with various amounts of tin, copper, and zinc added to give different properties to the mix.

"And of course, mercury is the second most toxic element on the planet, after plutonium. It is considered a dangerous material by both government agencies and the medical community, and we must take special precautions to both store it and use it.

"Dental amalgam also off-gases continually as we chew, and this vapor is inhaled and absorbed by the body. Some experts believe the reason some patients and dentists are less affected by exposure to mercury is for one of two reasons: fewer incidents of exposure, and the ability to detoxify the substance, through the use of anti-oxidants and chelating agents, and a healthy diet. Cleansing the intestinal tract, keeping the liver and kidneys healthy, using a far infrared sauna, drinking good water to flush the acid radicals out, along with a good exercise program, need to be part of a good health plan. **h&h**

Dr. Willock adds a certificate of completion of an extensive course in environmental medicine to his wall of diplomas and awards.



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 A holistic approach  
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