

“Many systemic health problems are either caused by, or influenced by the oral cavity—the teeth, tonsils, and sinuses—and clearly there is a direct and powerful connection between overall physical health and oral health.”

Says Chapel Hill holistic dentist Dr. Michael Willock with a smile, “Not a day passes that I fail to become more aware of—and more fascinated by—mind-body connections related to oral health.

“There are experts who believe that many systemic health problems are either caused by, or influenced by the oral cavity—the teeth, tonsils, and sinuses—and clearly there is a direct and powerful connection between overall physical health and oral health. And when you talk about physical and oral health, you are inescapably considering mental and emotional issues, as well. In fact, as we are increasingly more willing to acknowledge, all of our parts—body, mind, and spirit—make up the whole in an interconnected way.

#### MERIDIANS AND TEETH

“In my studies, I’ve come to understand that the major organ acupuncture meridians also flow through the region of the oral cavity, and the teeth can affect these major organs at a distance through their influence on these meridian-energy pathways. We are becoming more aware of how gum and dental disease can be a factor with a multiplicity of health problems, with heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, premature births, and pneumonia among them.”

Dr. Willock explores those connections and pathways with passion and skill. He is a long-time accredited member of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT) and in the recent past spent hours of his life on airplanes and in classrooms to complete an 83-hour post-graduate course in environmental medicine for health care professionals at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The course was an eye-opening experience, he says. “I’ve known for a long time that we all live in a highly toxic environment and this course took that knowledge to another level. We studied in depth the impact on our bodies of such heavy metals as mercury and nickel and cadmium—metals used in dentistry—and spent a lot of time studying effective ways to detoxify the body. The problem of toxicity is pervasive and massive: the air we

## Our Mind and Our Teeth



Dr. Willock shares the good news with a patient that a dental procedure went well.

breathe, the water we drink, virtually all of the food we eat, and many of the other products we bring into our lives are, to some extent, toxic to humans, with reactions ranging from the apparent absence of symptoms to difficult, severe consequences.”

Shortly after completing his course work in Arizona, Dr. Willock was off to Texas to study with Dr. Jerry Tennant, an ophthalmologist and naturopathic physician and founder of the Tennant Institute for Integrative Medicine. Observes Dr. Willock, “Dr. Tennant was among the first researchers to identify and verify links between the health of the teeth and the health of other organs in the body.”

Even as he continues to study whole body health with Dr. Tennant, Dr. Willock has become a student of homeopathy—specifically

as it relates to oral health. He notes that “many homeopathic remedies have been found to be effective in treating various dental conditions—and all of those I’ve been studying carry the seal of FDA approval. There are, in fact, a fairly large number of homeopathic products designed specifically for dentistry.”

#### METALS IN THE MOUTH

Of particular long-term interest to Dr. Willock is the adverse effect of metals in the mouth for some patients. “It’s not unusual to find mixed metals in the mouth—for example, gold, silver, and mercury. Extensive research shows that the electro-magnetic frequency of metals differs from that of a healthy human frequency—and mixed metals in an acid or alkaline solution create what is in simple terms

a battery effect. The consequence is a chemical reaction in the mouth that may be linked to deterioration of health.

“Now,” Dr. Willock points out, “we have superior materials to place in teeth, such as composite resins and ceramics that bond to the tooth and seal it much better than can be accomplished with amalgam silver-mercury fillings or other metals.”

#### SYSTEMIC ILLNESSES

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, but often illness defies a label and thus becomes difficult to treat in traditional ways. Fibromyalgia is a classic example of such an illness.

“I believe one of the best things we can do is rid the body of as many known toxins as possible. That, of course, includes mercury—one of the most poisonous metals on earth—and other environmental toxins that may be around us such as pesticides, cleaning solvents, and mold that might cause a reaction in our bodies. When we rid ourselves of these substances, we can give our bodies a chance to heal and regain balance while providing proper nutrition.”

#### EXPOSURE TO TOXINS

“In the course in environmental medicine,” notes Dr. Willock, “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. When we do this, often the result is a noticeable improvement in health.”

As a dentist, he says, “I am exposed to heavy metals every day, especially when I do this work to remove mercury amalgam fillings. There are guidelines for this procedure which we adhere to with vigilance and discipline, for the sake of patient, practitioner, and staff.

“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 nutrition 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.” **h&h**

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 A holistic approach to oral health and wellness