



Dental health education is always a part of every patient visit with Dr. Willock.

All Our Parts Are Connected

Dr. C. Michael Willock is a Chapel Hill dentist—and a relentless student—with profoundly holistic interests and abilities.

“We’re talking about chronic illness in this issue, and I am reminded, in powerful ways, of the relationships between dental health and full-body health,” he says.

“Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic infectious diseases of childhood, for example—more common than asthma. Nearly 40 percent of youngsters entering kindergarten in our state have already been affected by tooth decay. They are on a slippery slope. One chronic health condition often leads to another.

“I still see patients in this practice who are long-time smokers, still puffing away, and in a kind but relentless way I encourage them to put down the habit. Beyond the obvious breathing and general health issues, from the oral standpoint we see gum tissue that often has immune response inflammation because nicotine is a drug that is a vasoconstrictor. There is a little muscle fiber around every capillary in our body, and there are drugs that can either relax this fiber, or drugs such as nicotine that can constrict it.

“When we constrict all of these capillaries on a routine basis, day after day, the tissue looks shriveled and somewhat burned and intensely inflamed—it’s in a very unhealthy state. And of course the effect is not limited to the mouth; the consequence is as true for the heart and other parts of the body.”

SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

Dr. Willock spends weeks of each year in classrooms and conferences, steadily adding to his understanding of the relationship of oral health to full body health. In the process, he has become knowledgeable in many areas, including dietary

issues and understanding effective use of supplements.

He is also an accredited member of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT), and completed an 83-hour post-graduate course in environmental medicine for the health care professional at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Scottsdale, Arizona, in classes made up of physicians and naturopaths. He was the only dentist in the class.

“Our purpose was to study the natural history of environmental illnesses, chemical sensitivities, and the impact on our bodies of such heavy metals as mercury and nickel and cadmium—metals commonly used in dentistry. There was also emphasis on neurotoxicity, endocrine toxicity, the effect of specific compounds on the immune system, and—of great importance—effective methods to detoxify the body.”

Shortly after completing this work, Dr. Willock went to Irving, Texas, to study with Jerry Tennant, MD, ND, at the Tennant Institute for Integrative Medicine, whom he describes as “one of the great pioneering thinkers in the evolving field of integrative medicine.

“Dr. Tennant was among the first researchers to make links between the health of the teeth and the health of other organs in the body,” notes Dr. Willock. “Now all of medicine is beginning to recognize the effects of dental materials and infections on the rest of the body.” Dr. Willock regularly continues his studies with Dr. Tennant and Dr. Hal Huggins, another pioneer.

“There are,” he points out, “critical issues about dental health and whole body health. Infections in teeth—which we call decay—cause canals and the bone around teeth to put out poisons called gliotoxins

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and thioethers that affect the meridian of the infection. Further, some dental materials are often toxic. Mercury, for example, is one of the most poisonous substances known, and it makes up about half the content of amalgam fillings. Nickel, common in crowns and braces, is toxic to the brain and other organs.”

Today, 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, and which are less toxic than many traditional materials. Every person is different, however, and people often react differently to various materials.”

Dr. Willock continues his extensive travels and studies as he broadens and extends his general practice to include many aspects of holistic dentistry, simply, he says, “to better understand and address the overall health concerns of all of my patients. Dental health and physical and emotional health are inextricably linked. My goal is simply to better understand those connections when it is helpful to my patients to do so.”

His studies in the past 18 months, in locations throughout the country, have included gaining expertise in biological dentistry, links between acupuncture meridians and oral health, homeopathic remedies with dental applications, blood chemistry, nutrition and supplementation, environmental and detoxification issues, and critical relationships between oral health and general physical health.

He is intensely interested in deepening his expertise in the broad field of biocompatibility, he says. “Every material and substance I put into a patient’s mouth has the potential to harm or help that patient. It’s well-established, for example, that the mercury used in amalgam fillings can pose serious health problems for people who are sensitive to that substance.

“My personal goal is to gain the knowledge and experience that will absolutely assure me that *all* of the substances I use with my dental patients are the best they can possibly be, free from contamination or risks of any kind. That is the simple reason that I am always seeking out new information from experts in the field, looking for every scrap of knowledge that may be helpful to my patients.” *h&h*

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