

HIGH RELIABILITY IN DENTISTRY: EFFECTS OF PAIN ON PATIENT, CAREGIVER, AND HEALTHCARE

Ryan Holmes

Loma Linda University School of Dentistry

Principle

At its core dentistry relies on a relationship of trust between the patient and the caregiver. This is particularly true when it comes to pain management involved in dental procedures. The ability of the caregiver in establishing a trust relationship with the patient leads to a more positive dental experience and an effective restoration of the patient's oral health.

Situation

I was several months into my clinical training as a third year dental student. I was assigned to Urgent Care, our emergency clinic, where several of my classmates and I were overseen by faculty dentists as we treated patients. Our sole goal was to identify the oral problem a patient was having and solve it within the same appointment. We operated autonomously, seeking the advice of one of the faculty dentists only when necessary.

My primary goal that morning was to eliminate my patient's pain. For the most successful outcome in managing his pain I would need to quickly develop a trusting relationship with him. This would be accomplished by actively listening to my patient, engaging him in personal conversation, and effectively discussing the problem and all available treatment options.

Methods of Implementation

It was clear to me almost immediately that the tooth causing his pain would most likely need to be extracted. I explained that we would take x-rays to help in our diagnosis as well as making it clear to him the possible outcomes and treatments that might be needed. In taking him to get x-rays we began to move from dentistry in our conversation to more personal items. I discovered his wife was a college student in the area and would soon be taking the Dental Admissions Test (DAT) and applying for dental school. He asked if I had any advice and I gladly shared with him everything I could think of that would help his wife. After looking at the x-rays it was clear that the tooth would need to be extracted.

Results

The tooth was in a difficult location but managing the pain appeared to be straight forward. After giving several injections he was finally numb enough for me to begin. About ten minutes in he told me he could feel pain. At this point one of the faculty dentists was checking in on me. I explained the situation and he demonstrated a different type of injection that would help in managing the pain. I began to work again but within several minutes my patient let me know that he was feeling pain again. I proceeded to give more of the same type of injection that was previously demonstrated, effectively relieving him of pain for another short while. Again, however, he told me he was having pain. I began to sweat, the procedure was still fairly new to me, and my confidence started to slip. I tried to think of another option

to help in managing his pain but came up with nothing. I had hit a roadblock to getting my patient out of pain. At this point I sought advice of a Faculty Dentist, who was able to effectively relieve my patient's pain with a stronger anesthetic. I was able to successfully finish the procedure, giving the patient instructions on managing his pain while at home. The patient thanked me, leaving the clinic satisfied.

Conclusion

The trust relationship between myself, the caregiver, and my patient lead to a more positive experience for the patient by effectively managing their pain and ultimately a more successful restoration of their oral health. A critical component that was achieved by establishing a relationship was an open line of communication; my patient made me aware of his pain when the anesthesia was not working. Because he trusted me, he patiently allowed me to continue in my efforts to manage the procedure with achieving profound anesthesia. In my experience patients are often more afraid of the needle used to numb them than the procedure itself. His trust allowed me to manage his pain more effectively, even when running into obstacles, because he trusted that I was doing everything in my power to bring him to a pain free state.