

High Anxiety



Dentists have not slept well since the last amalgam scare combined with the sterilization of handpieces to make insomniacs of us all.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD

Human behaviorists tell us that fear, guilt, greed, and lust are part and parcel of the human condition. It's amazing to me people can actually make a living divulging facts like this to the rest of us, but apparently this knowledge is essential to understand why politicians behave as they do, and to account for the obscene salaries paid to other people whose sole talent is tossing a ball through a hoop or hitting one with a stick.

While greed and lust would seem to be the operative factors here, *envy* might be another if you're on the outside looking in. It is more easily understood how fear and guilt contribute to the smooth running of society. This is what keeps you from testing a hot iron with your tongue or shoplifting a Skilsaw from Sears.

You would think every fear imaginable would have been documented by now and the antidotes disseminated so we could successfully avoid the consequences, but new fears are cropping up every day.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our own profession where the media love to be the first to spread the alarm. Dentists have not slept well since the last amalgam scare combined with the sterilization of handpieces to make insomniacs of us all. Here are a few potential fears you may not have thought of:

THE RECEPTION ROOM — Have you read *all* the articles in the magazines in your reception room? What if one of them advocated overthrow of the government? Or recommended some cosmetic procedure that resulted in a less than satisfactory result? Fifty million trial lawyers are ready to hold you personally responsible for providing this material to unsuspecting patients.

"Where did you get the idea for moving your ears forward and your eyebrows up?"

"From my dentist's reception room!"
"And setting fire to the Pentagon?"

CONTINUES ON 81

DR. BOB, CONTINUED FROM 82

“Same place.”

“The people rest!”

THE BUSINESS OFFICE — Chances are your business office is an ergonomic nightmare ready to inflict everything from carpal tunnel syndrome to a dowager’s hump on your employees. This is a test of employee loyalty you cannot afford to take. It would be a mistake not to allot some of your nocturnal wakefulness to this area.

THE LABORATORY — The potential for fear generated by your lab is so immense, you should definitely dismantle it immediately and move it to some remote place, preferably in the next county. The same reasoning applies to wherever you keep your central vacuum and air compressor. All these things rely on a physical principle called “centrifugal force.” Once unleashed, centrifugal force is capable like Hurricane Hugo of decimating everything in a 10-mile radius. You don’t want to be there.

YOUR PRIVATE OFFICE — Private?

Hah! Grand Central Station is private compared to your sanctum sanctorum. Unless you’ve installed a door that Chase Manhattan could be proud of, your office is as private as the Million Man March. Most of the sensitive material you harbor in your sanctuary is capable of spontaneous combustion due to laxity in federal regulations involving the corrupt paper industry.

Even though you may have difficulty yourself finding anything on or about your desk, bad people whom you would least suspect will have no problem at all extracting documents that could embarrass you or cause search warrants to be issued by judges antagonistic toward dentists. There is no soporific in the PDR strong enough to counter this.

THE OPERATORY — The operatory, by definition, should be the one place where you are in charge, as much in your element as a goldfish in its bowl. Wrong! Here’s where air, water, electricity, vacuum, sharp things, corrosive things, radiation, and infection meet in a vortex of anxiety, apprehension, and resistance.

It is true that over the years we’ve learned to cope with most of these fears to the point where our anxiety level is no higher than you might experience if accidentally buried alive, but the malady lingers on.

THE FUTURE — Managed care. This has been rightly classified as the Fear du Jour. Maybe it will go away. What are the odds? Will mercury fear go away? Will backflow? Will your ulcer? These concerns are expressed in *Horseman’s Law of Balanced Inertia* as “For every moment of perceived tranquility, there is an equal and opposite moment of abject fear.” It was on this fundamental axiom that dental societies were formed long ago. Ostensibly to further education and promote camaraderie amongst dentists, the real reason that dental societies continue to flourish

is that they provide a forum to exchange mutual fears. There is nothing that allays the worries of a fellow practitioner as much as discovering he is not alone. It would be appropriate to stand before each meeting and sing a variation of that old song:

“... For your fears are my fears,
And my fears are your fears,
The more we get together,
The happier we’ll be.”

To further this concept, we should apply to *Mad Magazine* for permission to use Alfred E. Neuman as our mascot, diastema and all, and dump that pathetic little molar that is featured on too much of our literature. Our new motto would then be, “What, me worry?”

It’s worth a shot. ■■■■