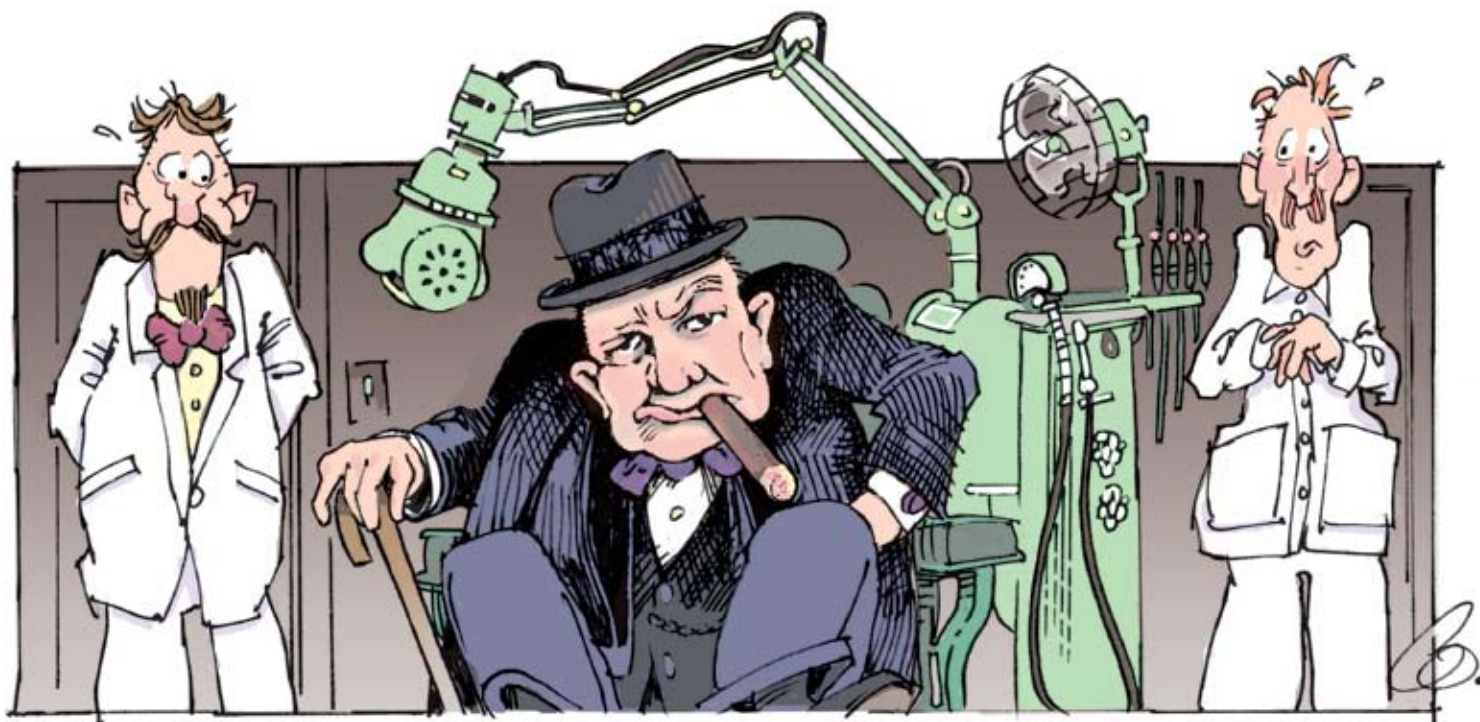


Churchill and Other A-lishters



For reasons that are not quite clear, his speech impediment became a famous hallmark, one that needed to be preserved at all costs.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
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How many of us have had a famous person or celebrity as a patient? Very few, I suspect. Considering the number of people who consider themselves renown, even if only in their own minds, it's remarkable how lucky we are. Admittedly, a certain ego-building satisfaction comes with having high-profile patients. This can be occasionally diminished by their highly developed sense of entitlement. I had a city councilman once, but he only lasted one term, so the mantle of celebrity dentist never draped for long over my sloping shoulders.

Some dentists thrive on pressure. I don't know any. Dentists aren't really all that fond of treating one another, as a matter of fact. To be known as a "dentist's dentist" might privately bolster your self-esteem, but at what price? The stress is maximized, the fee minimized. And what if your patient happens to be a world-fa-

mous leader? Historians will record every aspect of his or her life to the end of time and don't think the icon's teeth won't come under close scrutiny, especially if they played any significant role in it.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the case of Sir Winston Churchill, prime minister of England from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1950 to 1954. Everyone who has ever heard the recorded voice of Churchill reassuring the British people during the Battle of Britain "... we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds ..." would recognize the voice even if it were placing an order for fish and chips.

From early childhood, Churchill suffered from a pronounced lisp. He was never able to produce a proper "s" although he eventually managed to make the "sh" sound after practicing something

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like “sister Susie sells seashells by the seashore.” For reasons that are not quite clear, his speech impediment became a famous hallmark, one that needed to be preserved at all costs. When he made that noted statement in reference to British fighter pilots during the Battle of Britain: “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few,” he might just as well been speaking of the British dentists who were able to save his distinctive speech patterns.

Somewhere early in his career that saw him entering Parliament age the age of 26, he lost his upper laterals and centrals, and the pair of upper left bicuspid. Parliamentary debates can become quite agitated at times, but history seems to have overlooked the actual etiology of these particular losses. In any event, they were replaced initially by a vulcanite denture with the predictable results. He wore it in his pocket more often than his mouth, eventually sitting on it and breaking it.

Enter Wilfred Fish, a dentist, and Derek Cudlipp, a dental technician, a pair of professionals with the patience of Job. They were destined to see Churchill through war and peace with such dedication that it should have qualified them for sainthood, if not knighthood.

Technical note: Fish and Cudlipp made a cast gold partial with porcelain teeth facings and clasps on Nos. 14 and 6. They discovered immediately that the horseshoe-shaped casting must not touch the palate. There had to be a minute amount of spacing to compensate for the lisp, or the entire Churchillian speech pattern was lost. Don't ask why. These intraoral tinkering involved many appointments during which Churchill smoked two cigars and used brandy as a mouthwash. It is not recorded what Fish and Cudlipp used; Xanax hadn't been invented yet. When the prime minister's patience became exhausted with the adjustments, he would place his thumb in

his mouth against the metal palate and flick it across the room. I've seen people do this in Italian movies, but never knew what it meant.

Winnie broke everything. Not all at once, but a facing here, a clasp there until it became obvious to the dental team they would have to make at least four partials to keep the speeches flowing and the war on an even keel. This was a grave responsibility for a dentist and his lab man, but that's part of the deal when you become a celebrity dentist. Hitler's dentist probably had no easier time, but it was *der fuhrer's* mustache rather than a speech impediment that had to be preserved. Not the dentist's fault it was flammable.

If you would like to be a celebrity dentist or feel you may be in danger of becoming one, there are several additions to the patient introduction sheet to consider:

■ Are you now, or have you ever been, a celebrity?

■ If you answered **YES**, do you believe your mere presence in this office is adequate compensation for our services?

■ Do you believe opinions other than your own have any validity?

■ Will you be accompanied by more than two large, heavyset individuals?

Please leave their rap sheets and this form at the front desk. We will call you ... probably. ■■■■