

# Disposal Fees and Extended Warranties: Milking the Cash Cow

*"Do you — state your name — hereby solemnly swear to take this patient as your own, to have and to hold in sickness and health, through sore spots and relines, in adjustments and remakes from this day forth as long as you both shall live?" ... Excerpt from the Bioform Oath*

A

You may not always know where your kids are, but the full immediate patient is always there.

ny dentist who has ever performed an immediate denture service for a patient knows the following to be true: The patient becomes an ex officio member of your family for a minimum of a year. You may not always know where your kids are, but the full immediate patient is always there.

Sometimes the relationship is forever, or until the dentist mercifully succumbs to self-inflicted wounds. A frequently used option is the out-of-state move, leaving no forwarding address.

For most procedures, there is a beginning, middle and an end. For immediate dentures, there is no end, at least not one that is mutually recognized by both dentist and patient.

The dentist, in his naiveté, is simultaneously suffused with frustration, despair and anger because he knows that once again professional retailers

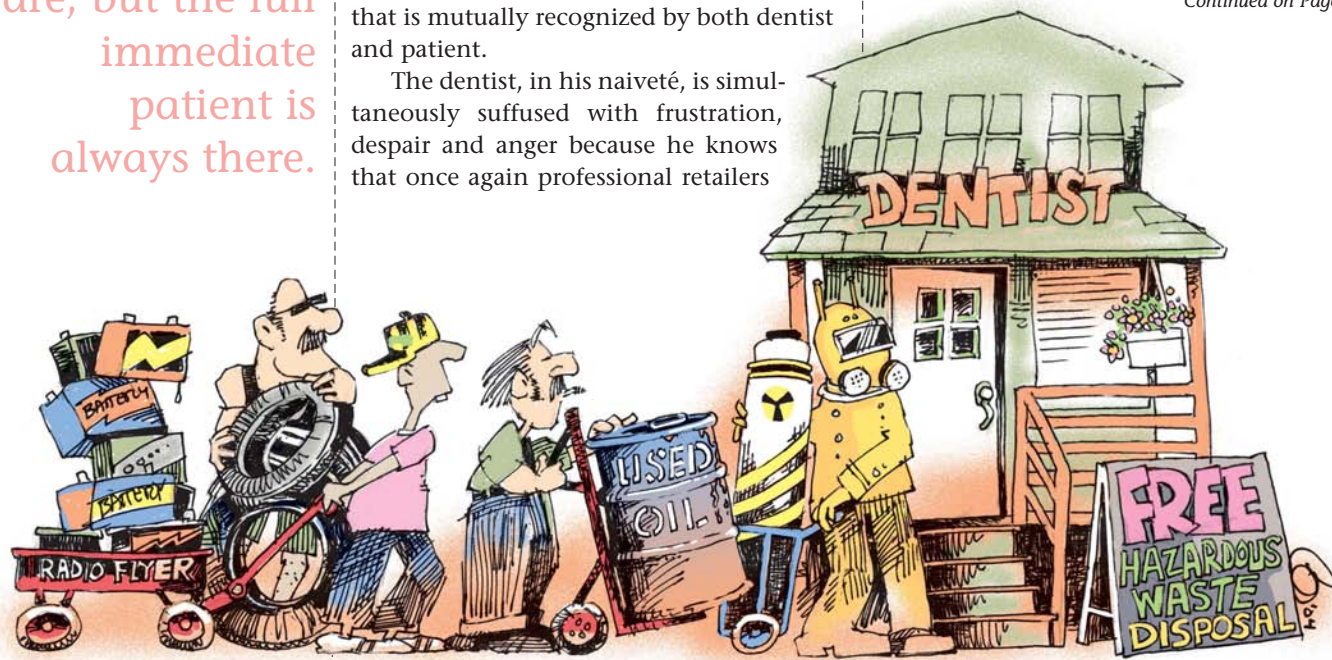
have made him realize what a chump he has been all these years.

First, our dental colleagues discovered that in the real world, hazardous wastes are disposed of for a fee. Car batteries, for example, and used oil from his automobile and his old tires are hauled away at his expense. In his own office, hazardous wastes generated by his patients' needs are hauled away, also at his expense. Never appearing on the dentists' bills are the words:

Sharps Disposal	\$25
X-Ray Solution Silver	
Recovery Fee	\$16
Disposables Disposal	\$12.95

Second, one of the most lucrative schemes retailers ever concocted has been operating successfully for ages and once again, the dental profession has missed the boat. We speak, of course, of the *Extended Warranty or Service Agreement*.

*Continued on Page 697*



## Dentists have always been very careful to avoid guaranteeing anything they do. “It’s human tissue,” we point out. “Who knows what it’s going to do?”

Continued from Page 698

You’ve just purchased your Kenmore washing machine from Sears. There is no way you will exit the store without being “offered” (see *The Godfather*, parts I through III) a service agreement. The service agreement says in effect that although you have purchased this marvelously engineered precision masterpiece of modern-day technology from us, it’s going to break. The cost of just one visit, say, to replace the interhybaric spin cycle configuration module is more than twice the extended warranty fee. So you buy it.

There is more pressure to take the service agreement than you would encounter at 40 fathoms without a diving suit.

Not once has a configuration module failed during the first four years of service even if you had four kids and the interhybaric spin cycle thing goes 24/7. But you don’t know that. If you should have the moxie to depart the store without surrendering to the salesperson’s blandishments, one of their account reps will phone you every three months for the rest of your life warning you about the perils of going without the extended warranty. Retailers love the service agreement. So would dentists.

Suppose your fee for a full immediate included the denture itself, the insertion and a 20-minute lecture on shrinkage and healing plus the standard warranty of 10 days or 10 meals, whichever comes first. The extended warranty, or “cash cow” as we professional tooth per-

sons will come to call it, covers sore spots adjustments up to four the first year, two the second and one on your birthday. It also includes relines and a box of denture adhesive attractively gift boxed. And last, but certainly not least, are two *occlusal equilibration* visits available on request even if you haven’t the faintest idea of what that means.

This overlooked bonanza would apply equally to crowns, bridges and fillings of every sort. Dentists have always been very careful to avoid guaranteeing anything they do. “It’s human tissue,” we point out. “Who knows what it’s going to do?” Nonsense!

What if Sears felt that way about its Craftsman table saws? All that extended warranty/service agreement money would be down the tubes, foolishly spent on food or rent, or some other frivolous frittering.

If a patient wearing one of our cast partials, or equipped with a mouthful of orthodontic appliances gets the uneasy feeling that without the protection of an extended warranty, the whole thing may explode at any moment, then our professional obligation has been met. We’ve come a long way. Dentists of 30 years ago would never have thought of that.

It is our fond hope that eventually we will be able to sell service agreements to patients who have no trouble at all. We may poke fun at lawyers and question their activities sometimes, but consider this: Who thought up retainer fees?

CDA