

The Team Approach Provides Optimal Treatment Outcomes

Most experts agree that dental implants represent the most significant development in dentistry, benefiting patients around the world. Unfortunately, confusing information on the Internet and in advertising claims is creating misconceptions about who should be providing dental implant treatment.

Should it be an implant “super” center claiming to be leader in implant dentistry? Does it make sense to have a general dentist provide both the surgical and restorative aspects of treatment? Why does the team approach involve a surgical specialist and a restorative dentist? The confusion can be cleared up with the understanding of the of the team approach and the benefits this provides for patients.

Implant “super” centers are advertising nationwide that they are the experts in implant dentistry and that their doctors are more experienced with dental implants than those in private practice. While many of these centers do have experienced specialists, they are not necessarily more experienced than specialists in private practice. Additionally, the treatment plans are rarely personalized for the unique needs of individual patients. The “team” of specialists at an implant center is not necessarily focused on saving teeth or providing alternative treatment plans.

In addition to the “super” centers, more general dentists are advertising that they provide everything under one roof, without any collaboration with specialists. Many of these ads state that the dentists have specific training and credentials in implant dentistry. However, it is important for patients to understand that general dentists do not have as much experience with surgical procedures and complications as Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and Periodontists, the only two surgical specialties recognized by the American Dental Association.

The Team Approach Advantage

Although the convenience of having all aspects of implant treatment provided in the same facility is attractive to many patients, dental implant treatment involves surgical procedures and therefore, the quality of care and patient safety should be the most important considerations. This level of care is only possible when the doctors that are providing surgical treatment have the expertise and experience necessary to perform the procedures with consistent results and more importantly, handle any potential complications.



The team approach, involving a surgical specialist (Oral Surgeon or Periodontist) and a restorative dentist or Prosthodontist, collaborating to provide personalized treatment options that meet their patients' individual needs, offers patients optimal treatment outcomes.

In this team setting, the doctors are providing treatment in their individual areas of expertise, rather than trying to be a "jack of all trades and master of none" with dental implants. This is critical, as it is nearly impossible to become an expert in all surgical and restorative procedures involved in comprehensive dental implant treatment. Therefore when surgical specialists provide the surgical procedures, such as implants placement and bone grafting and restorative dentists provide the replacement teeth, patients receive the highest quality care.

Ideally, patients considering dental implant treatment should select a team of doctors in private practice that will work with them to develop a personalized treatment plan that addresses their concerns and meets their unique needs.

To appreciate the importance of having specialists involved in providing dental implant treatment, an understanding of the scope of each specialty and the extensive training that specialists receive after completing dental school is helpful. Descriptions of the specialists that participate in implant dentistry and are recognized by the American Dental Association (ADA) are provided to assist patients with their selection of doctors.

ADA-Recognized Specialists Involved in Implant Dentistry

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons are specialists in treating problematic wisdom teeth, facial pain, and misaligned jaws, as well as surgical placement of dental implants and bone grafting. They also treat facial injuries and care for patients with oral cancer, tumors and cysts of the jaws. Following dental school, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons are surgically trained in a hospital-based residency program for four years, including intensive training in the administration of anesthesia.

Periodontists specialize in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of periodontal (gum) disease, the surgical placement of dental implants and bone grafts, as well as the treatment of oral inflammation. They also provide tissue grafting procedures to treat gum recession and periodontal plastic surgery to reshape gum tissue, which improves the appearance of the smile. Periodontists receive an additional three years of specialty education and surgical training beyond dental school.

Prosthodontists specialize in the restoration and replacement of teeth and are referred to as the "architects" on the team of specialists. They are the experts in complex situations, such as patients who are missing all of their teeth. Prosthodontists have additional training after dental school in a three-year residency program, including dental implant reconstruction, crowns, bridges, dentures, removable partial dentures, TMJ (joint) problems, traumatic injuries, and oral cancer reconstruction.