

SECOND OPINION

written by Dr. Michael Fleming

Health professionals enjoy a very high level of confidence among consumers. Studies indicate your dentist is one of the most trusted of health care providers. However, there may be occasions when you will want to secure a second opinion. This is especially true if you feel uncertain about the treatment being proposed. There are a number of very good reasons you may wish to seek additional advice and counsel before entering into what could be expensive, and perhaps even unnecessary dental treatment.

Today's consumer of dental services is more informed and educated than at any time in the history of the profession. The demand for cosmetic and re-constructive dental procedures has skyrocketed in recent years. At the same time, the technology required to deliver these services has and continues to be introduced at a rapid pace. While these advances in dentistry are exciting and desirable, they often come with a high price tag, both to the dentist and the patient.

Dental services are heavily marketed today and the profession is becoming highly competitive. As a result, patients can become confused about their treatment options, and may be unaware that certain procedures may affect the longer-term health of their teeth. This can result in the need for even more treatment in the future.

Should you feel ill at ease with treatments recommended by your dentist, let him or her know of your concerns. Very often, confusion over treatment options can be resolved without a second opinion simply by communicating with your dentist. It is indeed unfortunate so many patients do not take this important step before deciding to seek another opinion.

This requires you overcome any reluctance you may have to ask questions of your dentist. Thoughtful practitioners will not be threatened by your questions and will be glad to explain their recommendations to you. The first thing a considerate dentist will want is for you to fully understand what you are getting into.

Ok, you've tried the communication route and you still have doubts or questions that go unanswered and you are now thinking about talking to another dentist before you agree to any treatment.

Let's consider some of the circumstances that might dictate you get that second opinion:

You have been seen routinely in your dental office over the past few years and your dentist is now recommending extensive restorative work that has not been discussed with you in the past and that you were not expecting;

You have been seen for the first time in a new dental office and extensive dental work is urgently being recommended. Your former dentist has seen you regularly and this kind of work was not suggested before;

Your dentist's attitude toward you changes for the worse when you question his or her treatment recommendations or you feel that he or she is dismissive or condescending. This type of behavior

is one of the more common reasons for patients either seeking second opinions or leaving the practice altogether;

You have been presented with treatment recommendations that are complex and expensive but you knew you had a lot of work to be done. It might be good to get another opinion and explore other treatment options. It still would be best to first ask your current dentist if there are other ways to solve your dental problems that might better fit your budget if finances are a concern;

You feel pressured by the dentist or staff to get work done as soon as possible or feel you are being subjected to the “hard sell.”

For example, one of the most common problems seen in a dental office is a cracked tooth. Usually the patient knows there is something wrong because they have symptoms like cold sensitivity or pain whenever they bite a certain way. It may be appropriate for the dentist to recommend a crown under these circumstances. However, if you have teeth in your mouth there will be cracks in some of them, most of which give no symptoms and cause no problems whatsoever. Some of these teeth may need treatment in the future but most will likely not require it, and at least not immediately.

If your dentist recommends crowns on otherwise symptom-free teeth simply because they have cracks in them or tells you something terrible might happen if you don't fix them now, then you have every right to get another opinion before you agree to treatment. Over-treatment of teeth is a hot button issue in dentistry; so get all the information you need to feel comfortable with the treatment you agree to. The bottom line is, if you feel ill at ease with any treatment recommendation; communicate your concerns first to your dentist and then get another point of view if you need to do so.

Finally, remember there is no reason that seeking a second or perhaps even a third opinion should become a guilt trip. Some patients feel badly about their decision to seek out other advice, particularly if they have been a part of a dental practice for many years. Just go ahead and get that second opinion if you need it. In the long run, you will feel much better about your treatment, regardless of which dentist you choose to actually do the dentistry. After all, it is your money that you are putting where your mouth is.