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Convenience vs. Community

The Way of dentistry is changing. Is it for the better? *By Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: My doctor is in a huge group practice and now my medical records are all digitized. Every year I feel less like a person and more like a number. Is that going to happen with dental offices as well?

A. We have each enjoyed the personalized friendly sense of belonging in a smaller medical or dental office, and indeed most dental offices in the US are still solo or small group practices.

That seems to be a challenged trend however. Here's why:

Patients are seeking more and more "convenience," and when surveyed say they'd rather be treated under one roof than be referred across town for adjunctive specialty services. Couple that with the concept of shared costs for the hugely expensive high-tech equipment available today. If we want to offer the most awesome contemporary solutions to dental disease and cosmetic flaws, it makes economic sense to share the equipment under one roof.

Next, with the mandate of electronic records looming before us, most dental offices are converting from paper to digital as well. Speaking from personal experience, the conversion process was, at times, frustrating and could occasionally distract us from the warm, present, personal communications that were our every intention.

No matter how fancy we get in health care, there is NO substitute for genuine caring and recognizing you as an individual. If the culture in your office prioritizes "high-tech" experiences to match their high-tech progress, it's noticeable. The benefits are more than just good feelings. In fact, research shows that we actually heal better when we are cared about as individuals. Is anyone surprised by that?

If you're feeling slighted, don't be afraid to provide some gentle feedback to your doctor or dentist. It might serve as a helpful wake-up call.