

FOCUS ON

Giving Patients What They Want

Nick Clausen, chair of the Manufacturing Council and a member of the Education Committee for the Academy of Laser Dentistry and director of laser mastery for Fortune Management, focuses on successful laser implementation that transforms the dental patient experience from fear to gratitude.

A Brief Background

Every successful business provides value by creating pleasure or reducing pain (solving problems). But the dental marketplace has unique dynamics we must consider. Look at these statistics from consulting company Focused Evolution regarding patients in the United States:

- 60% do not go to the dentist.
- 82% have anxiety about going to the dentist.
- 92% believe an attractive smile is a valuable social asset.
- 52% are dissatisfied with their smiles.

In the United States, the national average for re-care is approximately 35%. That means 65% of patients feel that their dental experiences did not justify regular relationships with their dentists! Most people want dental work done, and yet fear trumps desire. This is why most people still do not choose to go to the dentist until they feel pain. This results in perpetuating a negative perception of dental care.

The company 1-800-DENTIST surveyed 20,000 dental patients under the premise “Reasons a new patient would choose one dental practice over another,” and No. 3 on the list was “Customers want the practice to have modern technology.”

Can laser dentistry be one of the technologies that patients are looking for to help remove their anxiety and to do procedures they want, thus bringing in more of the population that continues to resist seeking regular dental care? I believe that the answer is yes, with the caveat that your team and you must be properly trained.

Discover Today's Laser Technology

When dental lasers were first introduced, some were marketed as a solution for all of dentistry's ills that could “automatically” make clinical procedures easier without the use of a shot or drill. However, the first generation of dental lasers had some clinical limitations and a steep learning curve, and many did not live up to their promises. Those early limitations left a long-lasting stigma that lasers are just another technology that “sounds too good to be true.” However, I can tell you unequivocally that modern lasers are more versatile, more reliable, and easier to master than their predecessors.



Nick Clausen

Although the learning curve has been flattened considerably, training is tremendously important for both the doctor and the team. Clinicians perform most dental procedures tactilely, while laser dentistry is largely visual. Making this paradigm shift and applying it to clinical practice is not hard; it's just different. You simply need to *embrace the difference!* Buy-in from your dental office team is also paramount, and all must clearly communicate their support of this technology and be willing to maximize the integration of this new approach.

Laser Benefits

1. An Improved Patient Experience. There are many reasons why patients don't go to the dentist or return for regular scheduled maintenance visits. Primarily, it is their fear of the shot and dislike of the sound and vibration of the dental drill. No matter how good you think you are at administering anesthesia, patients do not like the needle or the long-lasting numbing effects. Imagine if you could treat a cavity and not give a shot or use a drill and the patient felt nothing! Would that change the patient's dental experience? When patients have this positive laser dentistry experience, things dramatically change because their underlying fear

is gone. They will become compliant in hygiene, accept suggested care options, and happily refer friends and family. Imagine the impact this can have on your bottom line.

2. Clinical Versatility. Lasers are used to ablate tooth structure, bone, and soft tissue. It does not get more comprehensive than that!

3. Better Dentistry. Let's take a look at the short list of the clinical benefits of lasers over cold steel.

- **Less Invasive:** Lasers can be more conservative than traditional modalities when you use the least amount of power possible to achieve the clinical objective. When this rule is followed, laser dentistry is truly microdentistry, and with soft tissues, sometimes there are only a few microns of edema! This allows you to do much more with topical anesthesia than you thought possible. In addition, patients not only heal faster, but the postoperative discomfort is almost nonexistent.

- **Inflammation Reduction and Healing:** This is accomplished by photobiomodulation properties that lasers have on cells at a molecular level. In numerous studies, light energy has been shown to elicit biological responses in the cell that normalize cell function, aid in tissue repair, and release neurotransmitters. Laser light energy can also reduce pain and increase local blood circulation.

- **Improved Hemostasis:** The laser is so selective that there is rarely any bleeding, and, if there is, it is usually very minimal and quite easy to control.

Closing Comments

When dental practices fully commit to implementing laser technology and focusing on the overall patient experience, amazing things can begin to happen. Patients will have less of that underlying fear when they enter the dental office, and they will begin to accept proposed treatment plans because of their positive laser experiences. Your patients will also start to tell their families and friends about you because you and your laser had such a positive effect on them.

It's time to take another look at dental lasers!

Mr. Clausen received his business degree from Iowa State University and his MBA from Creighton University. He is the founder of Dental Laser Coaching and speaks and coaches on dental lasers nationally. He can be reached at nclausen@dentallasercoaching.com.