

The Age of the Super General Dentist has Arrived

by Timothy Kosinski, DDS, MAGD



Dental implants, orthodontics, endodontics, laser dentistry, advanced oral surgery, periodontics and prosthodontics, radiology, CBCT, CAD/CAM design, pathology, TMJ and sleep dentistry, sedation, and pedodontics are all areas of our dental profession that general dentists are capable of mastering. It's imperative that proper education is achieved and in today's continuing education environment, there are innumerable programs that allow the GP to learn hands-on techniques that help them excel in practice.

Of course there will always be a need for our dental specialists to provide guidance and treatment in cases that are beyond the skills and experience of the GP. However, as dental education, as well as materials, tools and procedures continue to evolve—making us all more efficient and competent—the age of the Super GP is finally upon us.

With the advent of the internet and its use by the public to gather information on all types of consumer interest, dentistry is currently at a forefront. Patients can simply search for a particular problem and find some type of solution, if not also referrals to professionals deemed competent to resolve said problem.

Dentistry continues to evolve into a consumer-driven profession. Patients can find out about techniques to whiten their teeth, fill gaps in their mouths with dental implants, how to straighten their teeth, or even attain that “Hollywood” smile that seems so prominent today. These consumers present our offices with specific desires. As professionals, it is our job to educate and instruct these patients as to the benefit and risks of each individual procedure. If the dentist is proactive and continuously elevates his or her education and experience to a higher level, it's easy to make these patients more aware.

These very same patients come into our general dentist offices and—if they find our assessment appropriate—want the treatment provided. If we are capable of providing a service, it is both professionally stimulating and financially rewarding. Referrals have their place, but the Super GP is able to provide more of the services requested in-house. Again, it is imperative that the GP gather the highest level of dental education, especially after graduation from dental school.

Exceeding the expectations of the patient is a critical aspect of the Super GP practice. As we achieve excellence through clinical skills and modern technology, our patients develop a higher level of trust and appreciation for what we are able to do for them.

We are technicians in one aspect of our profession, but we are certainly also artists who are able to visualize our final product before ever beginning: As diagnosticians, we are able to see problems, whether that be stained teeth, cavities, abscessed teeth, edentulous space, loss of bone or even unusual growth.

We know the mouth is the gateway to the rest of the body and its condition can significantly impact overall health. As dentists, we must always stay aware that we are the gatekeepers.

As such, comprehensive dentistry takes into account the health and welfare of each patient we see. For example, dental implants have become exceedingly popular in our profession today. However, only a small number of GPs in the US, train themselves to surgically place dental implants, although a majority feel capable of restoring the implants. Dental implant therapy is a multilevel, detail-oriented process, but surgical placement is certainly within the realm of the GP when proper education is achieved.

Of course, becoming competent and confident in the procedure and modern technology is learned through experience. Another example: High-tech CBCT technology allows us to create a three dimensional image of the patient's mouth. It allows the dentist to perform a virtual surgery first, prior to any intervention into the patient's mouth, thus increasing accuracy and reducing the time needed to place the implants – materials have advanced exponentially and CAD/CAM designed restoration allows the dentist and the patient to review and evaluate the final product before fabrication.

Our patients' quality of life is the highest priority for the Super GP. Expanding your knowledge to incorporate the dental procedures most desired by the public is important. Investing in technology that makes our procedures easier, more cost effective and predictable is worth every dime. Many dentists will say that their patients cannot afford this “high-tech” dentistry. However, GPs cannot afford to not provide this type of service. Once you resign yourself to old techniques and fail to continue growing as a professional, dentistry can become mundane and a difficult job. Stimulation of the mind allows us to not only continue to practice for many years, but also rewards us with respect and self-satisfaction

Throughout my mentoring and through my educational dental implant endeavors, I've seen mature dentists who have “burned out” because of their lack of satisfaction, yet become totally reinvigorated and excited because they are



able to incorporate a before envisioned procedure deemed to be beyond their capabilities, a viable rewarding technique that they can provide to their patients.

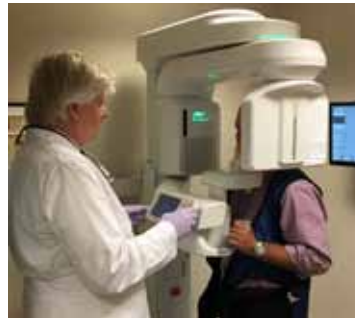
And our patients want us to do these procedures. How many times has a patient said, "Come on, Doc... I don't want to go anywhere else, can't you just do it?" Once your professional education on a procedure is achieved, you can be doing it right in your office. This also excites your staff and provides a means to reward the entire team, as new techniques are incorporated. Remember, we can't do it all, but by surrounding ourselves with exceptionally capable team members make us all fly to the highest level.

Finances should not be a reason for not enacting a particular procedure. There are many methods of financing available to the public today. Once we make our patients aware of the options available to them, we must determine how to make the procedures affordable. Personally, my job is to educate and instruct the patient as to what is possible. Everyone is on a budget today, no matter how much they have or do not have. The team's job is to find a way to make the process work, whether through maximizing any insurance benefits or outside or inside financing. Once the patient has a strong desire to improve their health, function or esthetics they are motivated to find ways to pay for such services.

So, I challenge the GPs out there to embrace technology, surround themselves with competent team players that compliment our skills, and recognize that society is in flux and dentistry is constantly evolving. Cosmetic dentistry advertising is not the end goal of the Super GP. In fact, I have never met a "non cosmetic" dentist. We are all capable of achieving high quality and functional and esthetic results, but the price for this is professional growth and high quality dental education.

The Academy of General Dentistry is one organization that advocates for the GP and provides the highest quality hands on or participation programs. Just going to a course and reading the newspaper does not constitute learning, rather working on patients make us competent.

The Engel Institute dental implant training program is another series that provides the attendees to actually place implants in one of their provided patients under a specific protocol under direct supervision of one of the mentor dentist. Although not a continuum, posterior surgical placement is achieved as well as atraumatic extraction and grafting



procedures and soft tissue repair. Training in CBCT analysis, diagnosis and planning and guided surgery is provided. This is exceptional education at the highest level.

Ultimately, I realize that there are many general dentists who struggle to find high-quality patients. We market and promote ourselves, often in a very crowded field. The best way to excel and elevate yourself from the crowd then, is to promote high-quality dental techniques at a competitive price and allow the patient to understand the benefits and help them with any financial restrictions. Inspiring the public in dentistry can be achieved by those GPs who invest in themselves.

You can guarantee success, both professionally and economically, not only by enjoying you work and providing the types of dental services the public is demanding but also becoming exceedingly competent and confident.

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