

Options exist for lower denture replacement

Recently, a denture wearer came in to my office. She was frustrated because she had been told by a dentist from another city that she could not have dentures made because the "standard of care" cited by that dentist was that dentures can only be made over two or more dental implants. Although she understood the benefits of dental implants, she was not ready to accept dental implant therapy as her only choice and felt that they had been "pushed on" her.

Before I begin, let me first state that dental implants are a tremendous development in dental care. Most people who have had dental implant therapy have had their quality of life dramatically improved, and there are very few absolute contraindications for dental implant therapy, especially when all teeth are missing from the lower jaw. Dental implants provide stability and greatly improve the retention of a removable prosthesis. However, for various reasons, dental implants are not appropriate for every denture patient.

Most commonly, patients and dentists choose to use 2, 3, or 4 dental implants in the lower jaw to retain a lower denture (properly called an "over-denture"). Clips, o-rings, or a combination of many different types of attachment mechanisms are placed inside of the denture to attach to the dental implants. Sometimes, a



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bar is fabricated to connect the implants together. If financially possible, "permanent" screwed in metal/ceramic implant bridges function very much like natural teeth, but at least five implants are needed for this prosthetic choice.

Many "inventions" have been developed that have promised to solve the problems associated with lower dentures without the costs of dental implants. These include dentures with nylon hinged flanges, suction-cup liners that look like the underside of octopus tentacles, various types of "mini implants", and of course the multi-million dollar industry that is over-the-counter denture adhesives. However, these solutions have failed to reliably improve denture retention and stability to the level of a well-planned implant-retained prosthesis.

Since dental implants require significant financial investment, the need for conventional denture therapy is still real and appropriate in many cases. In most cases, properly made lower dentures can still be made without violating the "standard of care". In fact, currently, there is no "...strong evidence supporting a single standard of care..." for

someone without lower teeth. (J Prosthet Dent 95:71-78, 2006).

As it turned out, the patient who was introduced at the beginning of this column did, in fact, ultimately opt for dental implant therapy. However, first a properly made conventional denture was made, and she was more comfortable with it than any previous denture that she had worn. Because of her knowledge, she saved and was then able to opt for three implants to retain her lower denture. Today, she is very comfortable and pleased with the result. The original doctor that she had seen was not wrong in his diagnosis, nor his recommendation for ideal therapy. He was incorrect, however, in identifying the "standard of care" for treating someone without lower teeth because there currently is none. There are, however, multiple appropriate treatment options that should be considered for denture wearers.

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