

Caring for the Edentulous Patient

In a series of Dentistry Today articles that began in June 2009, Richard Winter, DDS, MAGD, lays out his concept of “upgradeable dentistry,” which provides for a diligent continuum of care as patients gradually progress from removable prosthodontics to implants.

His approach, he believes, builds in excellence at every level by taking a full measure of each patient, which provides the basis for long-term success and patient satisfaction.

Financial considerations are one part of a paradigm that helps to “more fully educate dentists and patients about the many levels of dentistry that are not always discussed in appropriate detail due to insurance limitations, time constraints, and preconceptions about patient desires,” he says.



“Patients aren’t always treated with the dignity and respect they deserve with regard to their dental treatment options. Upgradeable dentistry is a concept that allows people the dignity to choose options that will improve their oral health in a sequential fashion, based on their emotional, financial, and personal readiness.”

Full and partial dentures are considered “provisional” prostheses in Dr. Winter’s practice, yet he also goes to “great lengths” on denture fabrication and fitting to create prototype restorations that serve as the foundation for any future implant-based treatment.

Dr. Winter moves forward on dentures with each patient only after lengthy communication on the consequences of bone loss and prolonged denture wear as well as information on the range of upgrade options available over time.

The underlying lesson, says Dr. Winter, is that dentistry is a “dynamic process” rather than a “static event.” “Patients who are allowed to remain engaged in their ongoing care through continual upgrades will provide an economic benefit to a dental practice while creating a huge dental benefit for the patient,” he says.

“This is realized, in part, through increased masticatory forces; improved esthetics, phonetics, and function; and social satisfaction, to name just a few factors.