

Excessive Fees

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The problem with Excessive Fees in Implant Dentistry. . .

(This is commentary folks and I tend to ramble a bit... So, only read it if you have a burning desire to know my thoughts in this area...)

There are some people that believe that if something is more expensive, it is better. That is not necessarily true and it certainly has not been my experience in the field of Dental Implants. Over the past 24 years, I have seen some outrageous fees for dental implant procedures both for the surgical phase of placing the implant and the restorative phase of constructing the "teeth". I have never found that high fees equal high quality. What I have found is that there are a number of practitioners who are very conscientious about implant placement and restoration and that regardless as to what their particular fees schedules are, all of them will have successes and failures in this area.

Here is a little primer about what implant fees are based upon.... The cost of manufacturing a dental implant is somewhere between \$6.00 and \$9.00. Dental implants are made of Titanium. Titanium is one of the most common metals on Earth and the procedures for forming it into dental implants are well know and basically universal in their applications. The dental implant companies will sell their implants to the dentist for anywhere from \$85.00 to \$500.00. These prices reflect the implant companies advertising costs and other associated costs that they incur in getting the implant from the manufacturer to the dentist. Right now, I want to tell you that all implants are basically the same. The \$500.00 implant is no better than the \$85.00 implant. It is just that the \$500.00 implant has more advertising dollars behind it and the company selling that implant would love everyone to think it is better...

I'll expand upon this discussion a little more in describing some interesting aspects to the sales and marketing practices of one of the major Dental Implant companies in the world, Nobel Biocare. Let me start by saying that Nobel Biocare (formally known as NobelPharma) is a company that I respect and deal with. I have never had any problems with their product and I do use their products from time to time. NobelPharma was one of the first legitimate dental implant companies. It is based out of Sweden and now world wide and it is directly affiliated with the discoverer of modern dental implantology, Dr. P. I. Branemark. Nobel Biocare started out with one particular type of implant. They said it was the best implant and sold it at a premium. Over the years, they would change the design of their implant slightly calling it new and improved. They would add designs, some of which survived in the market place and some which did not. Nobel Biocare said everyone else's implant was inferior to theirs yet they are the only implant company to have their implant banned from the United states for a period of time (The reason for the ban from the FDA was related to their sterilization procedures). Several years ago, Nobel Biocare bought a company, SterriOss, who makes one of the implants that Nobel Biocare had deemed of inferior design. This increased their control of the market from 20% to 40%. Coincidentally, Nobel Biocare changed their entire marketing structure to now tell dentistry and the public that all of these combined implant designs worked and were superior to anything else being sold by any other company in the dental implant market. I think not! Implants are implants and the scientific literature has yet to distinguish one implant that has any superior qualities to any other implant.

This entire situation is further complicated by dentists who like to say their implant is better than anyone else's. This, of course, is not true. I have used most of the major implant designs from the major implant companies and I have never been able to detect a difference and neither has the true scientific literature. I place dental implants in my area for over 50 dentists. They occasionally ask me to use an implant that is more expensive than the implant that I use (the implants I normally use... The ones that I prefer.... sell for about \$185.00 each). That is fine for me as long as they know that I am going to charge the patient for the difference that I pay for the implant. My base fee for implant placement is \$1850.00 per implant and if I do a lot of work for a patient, I discount that fee significantly. The going rate in Boca Raton where I live is over \$2000.00 per implant. Some practitioners here charge as much as \$3500.00 per implant and in some instances, significantly more. My advice is to be aware of what you are paying for and to know exactly what you are getting for that fee.