Always be impeccable with patients and delivering bad news that not all the problems have been solved, and that these consultations can be difficult for most dentists.

As there is significant variability in what patients desire for their bad news consultation, and in what strategies work for individual challenging patients, dentists need a wide repertoire of helpful skills.

Finally, it is clear that ongoing specialised skills training is required to continually refine skills in managing these challenging consultations.

With the apparent increase in violence against health professionals, or at least increased awareness of this issue, it is likely that complaint resolution will have a positive reinforcing effect for both the staff and patients involved.

Assessing the reasonable-ness of the provider’s actions requires full understanding of the context within which these situations occur. It is important also that we are informed about the factors that influence decision-making in these situations and can critically assess the responses.

While recognising the fundamental importance of access to treatment, we must also be cognisant of the personal strain placed on the dentist, the staff at the front desk, and the financial consequences of treating violent or abusive patients.

There is also a need for the clinician to examine the circumstances that may have contributed to a patient’s behaviour, including medical, mental and other factors. Intervention or other strategies should be considered that provide realistic solutions and options for both patients and staff and, if at all possible, reduce the potential for harm to either party. All effort should be made to prevent the escalation of issues to such a level that denial of treatment is the only solution.

While both patients and our staff may have recourse to legal remedies, a range of other options, aimed at strengthening and continuing the treating relationship, also exist. Offices that continue the treating relationship, aimed at strengthening staff may have recourse to legal options for both patients involved.

With these thoughts, each one of us can certainly help ourselves to avoid and steer clear of bringing on more problems upon our shoulders than we need. Translated, this means... take enough time to evaluate a prospective patient, try to consider treating and dealing with them for the next two or three years before accepting them into your practice. This will be well worth your time and effort and will be one of the keys to your future success.

Please feel free to write in and share your thoughts, or secrets, for defusing hostility, coaxing compliance, and allaying anxiety in our patient relationships.

References:

About the author

Dr. Dennis Tartakow is retired from the private prac- tice in Palm Beach, Fla., and lives in Marina del Rey, Calif. He is a diplo- mate of the American Board of Or- thodontics and is editor in chief of Ortho Tribune.

Dr. Gregg Tartakow, DMD, is practicing orthodontics in Los Angeles, Calif., and lives in Marina del Rey, Calif. His professional ac- complishments include fellow- ships with the World Federation of Orthodontists, Royal Society of Medi- cine (England), American Acad- emy of Orofacial Pain and the Pierre Fauchard Academy. He is associate editor of Ortho Tribune.