

Don't Wait for an Emergency

Some patients think of the dentist's office as somewhere you go when you have a problem. Others realize that once you finish a well-designed treatment plan, all that is required for a long-lasting smile is good preventative care.



STEPHEN G. BLANK, DDS

Shirley Stoughton says her teeth had not been problem free for many years.

"I moved down to Florida permanently in 1994," recalls the retired home health caregiver from Connecticut. "In 1997, one of my teeth was bothering me and I just knew I was going to need a root canal. I lived just down the street from Dr. Blank's office, so I phoned to schedule an appointment with him."

Stephen G. Blank, DDS, practices cosmetic and functional dentistry in Port St. Lucie.

"Shirley first came to us as an emergency patient with an abscess," remembers Dr. Blank. "The tooth was in the lower front of her mouth and required root canal therapy."

"It was amazing," she says. "He did such a wonderful, professional job that the root canal didn't bother me in the least."

"I decided right then and there that he would become my permanent dentist."

As Shirley's dentist, Dr. Blank discussed her dental health, current conditions and desires.

"For patients like Shirley who have had problems in the past with their teeth, we try to prevent that from happening again. She needed a new denture for her top jaw and she didn't like the way her front bottom teeth looked. They were worn and broken down, and she had a removable appliance that displeased her. Further, she felt her teeth couldn't be seen when she smiled."

Mindful of his patients' expectations, Dr. Blank chooses his functional and cosmetic dentistry procedures and methods carefully. For Shirley, he recommended a full denture for her upper jaw and restoring her lower front teeth with crown restorations (see Sidebar) and a fixed bridge.

Shirley says she is so proud of her teeth now, and can eat anything she wishes.



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A fixed bridge replaces the space where one or more teeth have been lost. It is attached to natural teeth and is cemented into place. The teeth on either side of the bridge are crowned to provide strength, and the artificial tooth, called the pontic, replaces the missing tooth or teeth.

"We then designed a new partial for the lower back of Shirley's mouth and created a new denture for her top jaw that allowed her to have a fuller smile," observes the dentist.

Dr. Blank's smile makeovers include choosing the right materials, designing the length of the new teeth, ideal proportions, desired morphology or shape of the teeth, color, and any other aesthetic concerns. Patients' desires are always addressed.

"At the time, I admit I was concerned about paying for all of this," says Shirley, "but I worked it out. I knew I had to do something, so I committed to it and I saw it through."

Treatment plan

Because everyone's smile is unique, no single dental treatment plan is going to work for all patients. In order to create a customized treatment plan, Dr. Blank begins with a thorough diagnosis, and then presents different options for his patient to consider. In developing his patient's dental plan, Dr. Blank will balance ideal options with practical considerations such as cost. He regards the treatment plan as a critical element of a healthy mouth.

"When patients complete a well-designed dental treatment plan and then maintain their oral health with preventative care at home and with their hygienist, they don't have to think of dentistry as an ongoing process with repetitive treatments," points out Dr. Blank.

"Patients who don't finish their

treatment plans, or who never have one in the first place, are most often the people who have the emergencies, typically late at night or over the weekends. Relying on emergency care for oral health needs does not usually result in the best dentistry. These patients typically suffer much more trauma and often end up losing teeth. Their patchwork dentistry simply is not as effective as having a dentist design and complete a comprehensive treatment plan."

Long-lasting results

Dr. Blank completed Shirley's dental plan in 1999. Since that time, other than preventative maintenance visits, she has not required any further dentistry.

"In May 2007, Shirley chose to have a new upper denture to update her

look," notes Dr. Blank, "but that was a cosmetic issue."

"Functionally, her only dental needs have been good home care and a consistent schedule of maintenance to prevent any tartar buildup that could negatively affect her gums."

"I'm so proud of my teeth now," states Shirley. "My top denture always fits well, and Dr. Blank and his staff did an excellent job teaching me how to floss properly."

"I can eat most anything; in fact, I do eat everything – that's my problem," she teases.

"Dr. Blank has such a nice chairside manner. He has a relaxing way about him, and he never gets upset. He is just a nice person."

"And the staff – they can be so witty. It's just fun to go." **FHCN**—Kris Kline

New Crowns

During a diagnostic visit for a smile makeover, Dr. Blank designs the size, shape, color and position of the tooth restorations. Study models and photographs of his patient's mouth are taken and sent to the laboratory for a wax-up.

A wax-up, or a wax model of how the enhanced or repaired teeth will look, is completed by the laboratory, following Dr. Blank's prescription. It simulates the new teeth and is used to make any necessary changes before the lab proceeds to make the patient's new porcelain crowns.

"During the next step, the teeth are prepared for the new restorations, and any old, obstructing dentistry is removed," says Dr. Blank.

"Impressions are made for the laboratory, and temporaries that match the wax-up are created."

"The temporaries give our patients the opportunity to see how their new smile will look. At this stage, changes can be made, such as adding a bit of length or a little curvature or a slight reduction. We give the laboratory instructions on coloring, translucency, and brightness." Digital images of the temporaries are sent to the laboratory technician for better results.

Following this visit, patients leave Dr. Blank's office with resin temporaries.

"The temporaries look just like the new teeth are going to look," adds Dr. Blank.

The final step is to bond the porcelain crowns to his patient's teeth.

Dr. Blank invites you to visit his website at www.PSLDENTIST.com

Gold Medal Winner

Dr. Blank was awarded four gold medals at the 2007 Florida Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (FACD) Annual Scientific Session competition, which is designed to reward excellence in clinical cosmetic dentistry. The FACD is an organization devoted to seeking improvements in the science and art of cosmetic dentistry.



Stephen G. Blank, DDS, is a 1982 graduate of Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago. He has since completed intensive continuing education studies. Dr. Blank has studied TMJ under Mark Piper, MD, DMD, at the Piper Education and Research Center. He has completed the course continuum at the Dawson Center for Advanced Dental Studies. Dr. Blank was a clinical instructor with the Hornbrook Group, teaching dentists from all parts of the country in live hands-on courses on the various aspects of smile design, occlusion, full mouth reconstruction, and complete patient care. He is a facilitator/mentor with the Dental Boot Kamp program. Dr. Blank enjoys teaching dental teams around the country.

View your own Virtual Smile Makeover

For a free Virtual Smile Makeover by Dr. Blank, go to www.PSLDENTIST.com and follow the instructions.

For that healthy smile

Dr. Blank and his staff look forward to meeting the readers of *Florida Health Care News*. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call (772) 878-7348. His office is located at 184 NW Central Park Plaza in Port St. Lucie.