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Holistic Dentistry: Natural approaches to Oral Health

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Abstract: Holistic Dentistry or biologic Dentistry is an age old alternative approach that is based on the assertion that the whole body is one unit and any changes in one part of this unit can have an impact on the whole unit. Traditional Dentistry deals with the head and neck region in general and oral cavity unequivocally but Holistic Dentistry deals with the unrecognized impact of Oral health on the overall health of a person. It focuses on the use of on-toxic restorative materials along with incorporation of techniques like Acupuncture and Neural therapy. Although this concept and practice has brought about a tranquil revolution but some of the complementary methods followed by Holistic Dentists are under criticism. It is a paradigm or a philosophy within Dentistry and not a specialty. This article is intended to provide information on the current status of Holistic Dentistry as Natural approaches to Oral Health, its scope and its various approaches.

Keywords: Biologic Dentistry, Alternative Dentistry, Oral Health.

INTRODUCTION

If the idea of a Holistic Dentist is new to you, then you're not alone. But if Holistic Dentistry follows the same path that the rest of Medicine has been travelling, the concept probably won't remain unfamiliar to you and other health seekers for long [1].

Holism refers to a philosophical trend that claims that wholeness is more than the sum of its parts. The word stems from the Greek word *holos*, meaning all, whole, and entire, total. Over the last decade, Holism has received more attention in both Medicine and Dentistry.

Holistic Dentistry also called Biological Dentistry, Biologic Dentistry, Alternative dentistry, Unconventional Dentistry, or Biocompatible Dentistry is the equivalent of Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Dentistry [1].

Holistic Dentistry emphasizes approaches to Dental Care said to consider dental health in the context of the patient's entire physical as well as emotional or spiritual health in some cases.

It used to be that when someone said they were going to the doctor, it meant only one thing. They were going to see a physician trained in allopathic (conventional) medicine. While there were other professionals who treated problems of the body — alternative practitioners like Chiropractors, Acupuncturists, Osteopaths, Naturopaths and even Medical doctors who

practiced integrative care — many people either hadn't heard of them or hesitated to seek their help. The Medical establishment scoffed at them. Health insurance wouldn't cover their services. But things changed, in large part because of growing patient demand and a growing body of evidence that such alternative treatments were not only sought after, but had good clinical outcomes. For the most part, these alternative practitioners are now accepted as part of our spectrum of healthcare [4].

Like alternative Medical practitioners, Holistic Dentists approach care in ways that depart from conventional treatment, employ methods culled from other complementary approaches and reject some traditional procedures — especially Root canals and the installation of amalgam "silver" fillings — they perceive as being potentially harmful or downright dangerous.

HISTORY

The origin of Holistic Dentistry dates back to 1800, when the National Dental Association recognized the harmful effects of amalgam restoration and mandated that the members of the association should not use it on their patients. This was followed by many countries that have banned the use of mercury [1].

Holistic Dentistry raised further in between 1870 to 1948 with Weston A. Price. He conducted research and came to the conclusion that Degenerative diseases like Heart problems, Kidney and Bladder

disorders, Arthritis, Rheumatism, Mental illness, Lung problems and many other bacterial infections arise from Root Canal Therapy and Endodontic treatments [1]. His concept was widely known as "focal infection theory". Support of Price's theories continued further from a dentist named Melvin Page. He coined the phrase "balancing body chemistry" and considered tooth decay an "outstanding example of systemic chemical imbalances." He marketed a mineral supplement with claims that widespread mineral deficiencies were an underlying cause of several health conditions, including Goiter, Heart diseases, Tuberculosis, and Diabetes [1].

Last few decades have seen an increase in the number of people following Holistic Dentistry. Holistic Dentistry is now arising as a new field of Probiotic medicine [1].

PRINCIPLES OF HOLISTIC DENTISTRY

Holistic Dentistry follows few basic principles:[2, 8]

1. Proper nutrition in order to prevent and reverse Degenerative Dental disease
2. Avoidance and elimination of toxins from Dental materials
3. Prevention and treatment of Dental malocclusion.
4. Prevention and treatment of gum disease. Prevention and treatment of gum disease at its biological basis.

Procedures involved in Holistic Dentistry

The benefits of Holistic Dentistry are said to be the result of its incorporation of Hypnosis, Homeopathy, Aromatherapy, Nutrition, and Herbology into their use of Clinical Dentistry.

The more modern sciences of neural therapy, Hematology, Immunology, and Electro acupuncture may also be incorporated into a Holistic Dental practice.

Ayurveda in Holistic Dentistry:

Ayurveda is one of the oldest systems of Medicine and is nearly 5000 years with its roots from India. Ayurvedic herbs have nature's own power of remedies.

Formulated herbal tooth powder and paste are available that are effective and safe for number of diseases. These ingredients are combined in such a way that helps in cleaning of teeth, prevention from various Dental problems such as Dental pain, bleeding gums, mouth fibrosis due to poor eating habits or betel nut chewing habits, poor Dental root, sensitive tooth, tobacco chewing habits, Dental numbness, formation of tartar, poor Dental strength [1].

Many Ayurvedic formulations are prepared using Neem as a dominant ingredient. It could be in the form of herbal toothpaste or herbal tooth powder

making it a unique and powerful oral care formula containing active botanicals such as supercritical extracts of Neem Bark and Leaf, Grape seed, Clove, Fennel and other plants for maximum support of healthy gums and teeth. The herbal neem toothpastes that avoid the use of common "unnatural" ingredients like lauryl sulfate, saccharin, parabens, artificial colours, artificial flavour or fluoride serve the purpose better [2].

Propolis which is a natural substance based on resins of pine and collected by bees has been reported to cure oral ulcerations [3].

The sedative properties of Chamomile, Lime flower, Vervain, Rosemary, and Valerian are relied upon in the practice of Holistic Dentistry [4].

Nutrition in Holistic Dentistry: [2, 4]

Holistic Dentists take off from normal premise to consider the impact of Dental health in greater depth. Holistic Dentists believe that stress and tension are often linked to diet.

Dietary excesses or deficiencies increase the body's needs for essential vitamins and minerals, and the stress and tension accelerate any fears or phobias of the patient.

Aromatherapy in Holistic Dentistry: [4, 5]

Aromatherapy makes use of pure oil essences from plants and flowers that act as hormone-like stimulants to improve a patient's health balance. They are natural and gentle, oils like Lavender, Bergamot, Sandalwood, and Basil are beneficial in their power to soothe, relax, and calm.

Homeopathy in Holistic Dentistry:

Homeopathy is used by Holistic Dentists as a natural approach to their practice. The therapy is a safe and natural alternative that is non-addictive and effective with both adults and children [1].

Homeopathic remedies are used to improve the Psychological or emotional condition of patients without the drugging effects of conventional tranquilizers.

The three main remedies considered by Holistic Dentists include: *Aconite* (foxglove); *Gelsemium* (yellow jasmine); and *Argentum nitricum* (silver nitrate) [1, 6].

Clinical experience has also demonstrated that many homeopathic remedies have been found to be effective for conditions especially Dental caries, Dental abscess, Oral lesions, post extraction bleeding and even medications to treat the anxious and nervous child [6].

Hypnosis in Holistic Dentistry:

When hypnosis is used, patients are able to relax their bodies and minds by concentrating on suggestions of relaxation. The patient is fully aware of what is happening during their treatment and no drugs are used. Its use is mainly suggested for apprehensive patients. It may banish fear and make other anesthesia unnecessary. The patient surrenders critical faculties rather than will power. Patients have terminated trances when the suggested situations become uncomfortable or threatening [7].

Many Holistic Dentists employ specialist Hypnotherapists to provide treatment that is highly effective and cannot cause any harm or produce any side effects [7].

Benefits of Holistic Dentistry:

It is natural, non-toxic, aesthetic, bio-compatible approach of treatment. It uses a combination of various modern day as well as traditional alternatives in curing of oral adverse conditions. These therapies believe in treating the root cause of disease rather than curing the symptom [4].

The Holistic Dentist believes that what affects the oral cavity can affect the whole body and vice versa [4].

Criticisms:

Holistic Dentistry as a whole has been criticized by conventional Dentistry and skeptics for the widespread integration of questionable alternative health practices. These practices include, but are not limited to: homeopathic therapies, herbal remedies, Craniosacral Therapy, and acupuncture [9, 10].

Dentistry, like Medicine, is grounded in thorough scientific research. For example, herbal remedies are often recommended in the form of mouthwash and toothpaste in order to prevent or treat certain Dental conditions [10]. They are supposedly safer products because they are 'natural'. However, there is a lack of scientific research which supports such treatments [11], and in fact herbal remedies have been found to impact the safety of more invasive or prolonged Dental procedures, and can lead to additional complications if they interact with a patient's current medications [12].

When correcting a "bad bite," holistic dentists often place a plastic appliance called a mandibular orthopedic repositioning appliance between the teeth. The long-term use of this device has been reported to cause the patient's teeth to move out of proper alignment, leading with amalgam fillings being one of the main concerns of Holistic dentists, many have turned to using non-toxic composite materials, but these too have come under scrutiny. The plastics used in the

composites have been linked to leaching compounds that may be dangerous to health.

Therefore proper knowledge and understanding about the Holistic approach is of utmost importance to effectively put in use the phenomenon of Holism in Clinical Dental Practice.

DISCUSSION

Oral health is an integral component of overall general health. According to American Dental Association (ADA) "Unconventional dentistry' is defined as encompassing scientifically unproven practices and products that do not ... conform to generally accepted dental practices or 'conventional' methods of evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment of diseases, conditions and/or dysfunctions relating to the oral cavity and its associated structures ... The dental profession advocates an evidence-based approach to oral health care that requires the judicious integration of systematic assessments of clinically relevant scientific evidence" [8].

The basic tenets of Holistic Dentistry are simple: Dentistry should do no harm, and dentists must look at the mouth, teeth, gums and jaws as integral parts of a larger, whole-body system. Holistic dentists see the mouth as more than just a receptacle and processing station for food. Indeed, the health and structural integrity of the mouth both influence and are influenced by everything else going on in the body — from skeletal mechanics to nutritional biochemistry.

A Holistic dentist believes in biological based care. The six components of biological based health care include (1) Biocompatibility; (2) Bioesthetics; (3) Biochemical balance; (4) Biomechanics; (5) Bioenergetics; (6) Bioethical care [1].

Biocompatibility deals with how Dental materials, supplements and remedies work in concert with an individual's unique immune system. All Dental materials have toxicity. The impetus is to use low toxic, biocompatible materials that get the job done. Either blood testing or energetic testing can test for biocompatibility [1].

Bioesthetics deals with synchronous harmony between visual beauty and Dental function. Everyone wants a good looking smile [1].

Biochemical balance deals jointly with buffered pH balance of the saliva along with bacterial balance of the constituent floras in promoting healthy oral tissues [1].

Biomechanics deals with occlusal force vectors stemming from teeth biting while eating and from clenching and grinding at night. Everyone clenches or grinds their teeth at night. Such activity can

interfere with delta sleep leading to tiredness especially upon awakening, or it can cause breakdown in tissue integrity along the force vector [1].

Bioenergetics deals with the innate energy force for testing complex or difficult to diagnose health issues.

Bioethics deals with treating patients with respect, honesty, and due care [1].

The present generation health sector is seeing a rapid transit towards the use of alternative therapies for treatment needs. People have become more inclined to complementary Medicine. The modern day approach is not limited to only an area of a person's body, but it takes into consideration patient's overall health. So, the Dentists using this new approach are concerned more about the effects of the oral care on the general health of the patient [1].

CONCLUSION

Holistic dentistry is an emerging field of Probiotic Dental Medicine that supports the life process. It is an aesthetic, relatively nontoxic, and biocompatible treatment modality, or life supporting treatment modality.

The knowledge and understanding of Holistic approach of treatments is still an ongoing process and further research should be carried out in this regard.

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