

Rapid City Journal

Endodontist Finds Rewards in Ending

By Laura Tonkyn
December 2, 2008

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH ... DR. MARK HOGG

Endodontist finds rewards in ending pain, saving teeth

NAME: Dr. Mark Hogg OCCUPATION: Endodontist at Black Hills Endodontic Associates

What does an endodontist, or root canal specialist, offer patients and why might a patient choose to go to one?

"Endo" means within. We treat infections that start inside the tooth, and most of the time, getting those infections to heal involves doing a root canal. Essentially, a root canal involves removing the infected nerve from inside a tooth, sterilizing the space called the root canal system and then sealing it or filling it so it doesn't get infected again.

The nerve in a tooth will die the majority of time due to a deep cavity. Decay allows germs to enter into the nerve. Sometimes, a traumatic injury will happen. That can kill the tooth, and sometimes the tooth will crack. That will allow bacteria into the nerve.

Some dentists will do root canals, and some prefer not to do any. Lots of times, we get involved in doing the more complicated treatments. A lot involve doing ones that haven't worked that other dentists have done - 36 percent are referrals from folks who still have infections. It's kind of like getting a sliver in your finger. If you get the sliver out, it will be OK; if you don't get all the sliver out, it won't. It's critical that you have to have a lot of experience, a lot of training and the equipment to do it.

Most of our patients are referred through their dentist, but they can call us directly. People who have been here before can tell what is going on and call, but most go through their general dentist. A general dentist is a good place to start, because it may not require a trip here.

What special training or experience is required?

It is one of the nine approved specialties of the American Dental Association. It takes two or three years of residency training after medical school. We do surgery on the jaws, too, which most of the time involves removing infection around the roots. If you can't seal the tooth from inside, you have to seal it from the end of the root. This involves making incisions through the gum and through the bone.

What do you like about your specialty?

I think endodontics is a kind of an area of dentistry that a lot of dentists don't like to do. It's quite technical and involves being very, very precise. We're involved treating people who are either in pain or

infected. It is very rewarding to get them out of pain and get them comfortable, and save the tooth and its function especially ones in front that they see.

What is not so much fun?

The most difficult part is dealing with patients that are very anxious and afraid and in pain. So it can be a little stressful in that regard. But we deal with them all the time, we get them calmed down and comfortable and everybody leaves with a smile.

Are there new techniques or, procedures that are improving your services?

We do things looking through a microscope, and we do things with computerized Xrays. We have drills that just literally make no noise - they are electric and very, very quiet. And then we sterilize the tooth with a laser. There is very little post-operative discomfort - 95 percent of patients have no pain after the root canal.

We used to do root canals with little tiny hand files. We now use a drill like a little fence posthole auger that brings everything out very quietly.