

# **A Study of the Attitudes of General Dentists Toward Prosthodontists**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Eighty-one percent of the General Dentists in this study work in a solo practice and 19% are involved in a group practice.
- Thirty-four percent have been dentists for 25 or more years while 18% stated that they have been practicing for less than 10 years.
- Root canals were perceived as the single most complex or challenging procedure to perform by 22% of the General Dentists while 17% contended that implants were the most complex or challenging.
- Regardless of the procedure they cited as the most complex or challenging, 22% felt that the particular process was difficult because it was time consuming and tedious. Some, 19%, felt that the complexity of that particular procedure was what made it intricate or challenging. Additionally, among those General Dentists who felt that cosmetics/laminates and fixed bridges were the most complex or challenging procedures to perform, there was a tendency for them to say so because both of these procedures required precision work and that there was no margin for error.
- Within the past 3 years, 20% of General Dentists have begun to do cosmetic and laminating procedures and 16% have started to do implants. An additional 10% declared that they are now doing crowns and inlays.
- When asked on an unaided basis what types of dental specialists they had referred patients to in the past 24 months, just 9% of the General Dentists mentioned Prosthodontists. On the other hand, 69% had referred patients to an Oral/maxillofacial surgeon, 63% had sent patients to an Endodontist and 44% made a patient referral to a Periodontist. Another 26% reported that they had referred patients to an Orthodontist, in the past 2 years.
- Those General Dentists who had not referred any patients to a Prosthodontist in the past 24 months were asked if they had ever made a referral to one. Among this group, 31% contended that they had, while 67% claimed that they had not. The primary reason for not referring patients to a Prosthodontist was that 70% of General Dentists said that they do the work themselves. An additional 20% remarked that there was no need to refer patients. Correspondingly, 62% of those respondents who have referred patients to a Prosthodontist said that they would refer extreme or difficult cases. Another 10% commented that they would refer patients to a Prosthodontist because they do better work.

- Among those who do refer patients to a Prosthodontist, 10% said they are referring more patients as compared to 2 years ago while 17% noted that they are referring fewer patients in the past 24 months. The majority of this group, 68%, told us their referrals to Prosthodontists have not changed in the last 2 years. Relative to how many referrals were made, 44% said they made 1 – 4 in the past 12 – 24 months, 18% made 5 – 9 and 11% referred 10 or more of their patients to a Prosthodontist. Somewhat interestingly, 23% maintained that they had not made any referrals within the past 12 to 24 months. Furthermore, 80% of the General Dentists believed that their referrals to Prosthodontists would stay the same over the next 12 to 24 months. A few, 4%, estimated that their referrals would increase, and 9% felt that they would decrease. When asked about the effectiveness of the treatment provided by Prosthodontists to referred patients, 57% evaluated it as “very effective” and 15% felt it was “somewhat effective.” Only 8% described it as “not at all effective.”
- Sixty-one percent of the General Dentists said that they were “very familiar” while 26% felt that they were “somewhat familiar” with Prosthodontists and what they do. Just a few, 7%, claimed that they were “not at all familiar” with them and their specialty. Moreover, 72% readily acknowledged that Prosthodontists have different knowledge and skills than a General Dentist. When asked how this knowledge and skills differed from that of a General Dentist, 28% commented that Prosthodontists have more education, 26% noted that they are more specialized and 14% asserted that they do more advanced work and are more skilled.
- Approximately one in three, 32%, General Dentists will either call or consult with a Prosthodontist when they have a problem with a patient or have a question. Most, 63%, will not. Among those who will consult with a Prosthodontist, 52% will do so for difficult cases while 28% will ask for a consultation for general advice or a second opinion. On the contrary, 70% of those General Dentists who do not consult with a Prosthodontist remarked that there is no need to do so because they will perform the particular procedure themselves.
- Seventy-two percent reported that the Prosthodontists in their area were not doing anything to promote themselves and their services to General Dentists while 20% recalled that there was some promotion going on. The most frequently noted activity was correspondence/mail, noted by 21%. When asked what kind of promotion Prosthodontists should be doing, 17% thought correspondence/letters/mail would be a good idea. The largest percentage, 45%, had no ideas for promotions. The majority, 55%, of the General Dentists did feel that Prosthodontists should promote themselves to General Dentists while 33% did not like this idea.
- More than half, 56%, of General Dentists were “not at all concerned” about losing a referral patient to a Prosthodontist. Some, 12%, were “very concerned” about this possibility while others, 15%, contended that they were “somewhat

concerned” about this happening.

- Seventy-one percent of the General Dentists claimed that they spend 20 hours or more a year on learning new procedures or for on-going training on current procedures. Only a few, 3%, said they did not spend any time for additional training. The type of training that General Dentists are going for includes implants, 21%, and cosmetic/laminates procedures, 21%. Forty-three percent are going to local dental schools for this training and 24% are attending seminars or conventions. Another 17% go to a local dental supply company. Just over half, 54%, reported that other General Dentists conducted this training while 28% noted that various specialists did it. In the minds of 45% of the General Dentists, new knowledge or new clinical techniques comes from dental specialists; 43% felt it comes from General Dentists. Others, 35%, thought it comes from dental schools.
- Those General Dentists who are in a group practice reported that their practice has an average of 2.4 General Dentists, 2.6 Hygienists and 3.2 General Administrative Staff.
- Twenty-two percent of the General Dentists stated that they see 100 or more patients in a typical week. On the other hand, 27% declared that they worked on fewer than 50 patients in a usual week.
- During a typical month, the General Dentists reported doing an average of 89 individual fillings and 77 cleanings. Moreover, they also said that they did an average of 32 crowns/in lays, 27 tooth extractions and 20 cosmetic/laminates procedures during a typical month. In addition, they stated that they did an average of 13 root canals and over 8 fixed bridges and a like number of dentures, during a normal month.
- Thirty-four percent of the respondents had their practices in a rural or small town, 21% were in a medium size town, 16% were located in a suburban area and 25% practiced in a city or urban setting.
- Twenty-three percent of the General Dentists reported that their annual revenues were less than \$500,000 while 4% said their practice brought in \$2,000,000 or more a year. A relatively large percentage, 43%, either would not or could not specify their annual revenues.
- Thirteen percent of the respondents had their practices in the East, 36% were located in the South, 15% resided in the Midwest and 36% lived in the West.

*Research Conducted by Just the Facts for the American College of Prosthodontists.*

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