

Editorial

impactedcanine.weebly.com

The great benefit of social media is that data can be readily provided, noted and shared. In most instances this can be positive, although websites, as largely personal creations, are highly subjective and often full of bogus or unsubstantiated information.

The above website, identified by endodontic colleagues, appears to be genuine. It makes interesting, salutary and very concerning reading which contains a level of unfortunate personal information. The website was developed by the distressed mother of a patient and tracks the orthodontic and other treatment of her son over the course of many years. The site was created so that other patients, and potential patients, might be informed about the management of impacted canines and the problems that could be encountered. A Google search will reveal a significant amount of information regarding impacted canines but will not readily uncover the weebly.com site unless a deep search is specifically applied.

The long version of the patient's treatment history, found in the menu bar, will take well over an hour to read, so detailed is the mother's account. Chronicled is virtually every appointment required to diagnose and treat the case and records the increasing level of frustration faced by the family as treatment misadventure occurred.

Gleaned from the information were the details that the family lived in a city on the West coast of the United States and the patient was treated in academic institutions. The problems of internal resorption and permanent tooth ankylosis are not routinely encountered in an orthodontic practice but clinicians need to be aware of the possibilities and diagnose early. This was not apparently done and the conditions went unrecognised but, when realised, a raft of 2D and 3D radiographic visits, followed by surgical, endodontic and periodontic considerations and appointments were undertaken. The mother was distressed at the lack of meaningful communication with her but, more importantly, the lack of communication between fellow professionals. So concerned was she with the progress of her son's treatment that she sought opinions from international specialists and even took her son overseas for consultation.

The many clinicians involved in the case changed due to relocation, retirements or for other reasons. This ultimately meant that opinions changed along with treatment direction and repetition of management. It is understandable that the mother became concerned but still relied on the advice of experts.

After many years, the treatment ultimately came to a compromised conclusion but after a considerable expenditure in time (many years), the patient's hampered social development, along with the family's disillusionment with orthodontics and the significant expense. The mother kept a running tally of the costs incurred which ran into an exorbitantly high sum, unaffordable by most.

The website only gives the family's account of treatment and so may be considered as biased. There would obviously be a contrary view presented by the treating clinicians. This was no ordinary case as the problems encountered were significantly more than the usual patient management issues of non-compliance. However, the case highlights that there is always a patient at the receiving end of treatment and whose well-being needs to be safeguarded. If readers care to access the website, they can judge for themselves whether the patient's best interests had been served and/or whether the credentials of the orthodontic profession, and other involved dental specialities, had been enhanced.

The account of the case is the stuff upon which the medico-legal profession thrives. The poor communication, the inadequate records, the conflicting opinions and the extreme difficulty of the case make it memorable for all the wrong reasons. It could be the case which next walks through your door!

The mother's description of her son's management makes a sobering read and forces an appreciation of treatment from the receiving end and the patient's perspective. How could it happen? Use your keyboard and see what you think.

Craig Dreyer