Four years of dental school is enough to charge a graduate with the responsibility to continue to stretch and learn and grow, but the challenge is in finding a course of learning that allows the dentist to become more and to offer better care to his or her patients. Most of the programs offer training in particular treatments and an opportunity to add new treatment options to the mix offered in the practice. While that certainly is an essential course of education, the most critical and fulfilling training that can be done is that which leads to being able to see the patient in a new light.

The ability to see the bigger picture and to create a focus on the full breadth of the impact of improper form and function is one of the most empowering skills a dentist can develop, and unfortunately it is exceedingly rare to find. The X-ray is perhaps a limiting diagnostic tool as it can become a crutch and detract one’s focus from the things that truly will make a difference. Exceptional outcomes are from a shift in focus to the health history and an evaluation of the soft tissues as well. This obviously would include periodontal soft tissue, but the forgotten or ignored markers are found in the muscles, structure and function of the body outside the confines of the mouth.

It has been shown that 90 percent of pain in the body is muscle in origin and engaging in a healing profession that treats based on pain, dentists are often sent down the wrong path by their reliance on X-ray based diagnosis. A review of symptomology as well as muscle palpation of the supporting tissues is critical in creating a proper diagnosis. This will help to paint the picture of the interconnections between the skeletal support of the bite and the muscles support of the bite, and the wide array of symptoms that could potentially arise from an improper bite relationship. Given this perspective, the patient can decide for himself or herself which course of action is most appropriate, but the key is that he or she can discover solutions to problems that generally were thought to be unfixable. In some cases, issues such as bruxism or grinding, are simply accepted as being something patients have to live with. No discussion of a cure or way to end the grinding is offered and the patient is given options to minimize the damage, but no option to correct the underlying problem.

Other issues such as a migraine are managed with medication and the treatment focuses on mitigating symptoms rather than eliminating the root cause. There are literally hundreds of symptoms that patients suffer and that arise from an improper bite, and the challenge for those in the field of dentistry is that the vast majority of these symptoms can also be the result of something unrelated to the mouth. It is in the health history and clinical examination of the patient that the dots are connected. Employing a cranial nerve evaluation, muscle palpation examination and a signs and symptoms review along with properly mounted dental models allows both the dentist and the patient to see that bigger picture.

This process gives the dentist the chance to appreciate the micro-occlusion or tooth gearing, but more importantly, it allows for an analysis of the macro-occlusion or the relationship of the upper and lower occlusal complexes.
lower arches. That perspective, combined with the more global health history and a clinical exam, has created an evolution in dentistry that has gathered momentum over the last several decades, which has been referred to as neuromuscular dentistry.

However, in reality it is simply comprehensive evaluation leading to comprehensive care. Dentists who practice neuromuscular dentistry routinely seek to resolved idiopathic and incurable problems for their patients. They eliminate grinding and end decades of patients suffering from chronic headaches and neck pain.

These dentists are seeing lower back issues resolved and numbness in the fingertips disappear. In addition, these dentists watch their patients return to enjoy a quality of life that they had given up on by providing care that goes so far beyond the act of restoring proper form and function and esthetics to teeth. Dentists who practice neuromuscular dentistry deliver care that changes their patients’ lives for the better forever.

As the continuing growth of our understanding connects with various aspects of healthcare, dentists are increasingly indispensable. The oral cavity is the gateway to the airway, and the proper macro-occlusion will support a proper airway. On the other hand, an over-closed or collapsed bite leads to macro-occlusion that is limiting the flow of air and the consequence is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). Optimal patient management of OSA includes support from a trained dentist to protect the airway through the night, and the neuromuscular dentist can also manage the daytime consequences that are causing grinding or headaches.

As a dentist, there is nothing more rewarding than to eliminate chronic pain and manage OSA, and literally save the lives of your patients. There are dentists around the world who are objectively and strategically managing their patients and seeing predictability and success in their care. However, this requires a more complete understanding and more comprehensive care.

Education that focuses not just on clinical tips but also on diagnosis is essential to becoming the best dentist you can be. While there are many options in dental education, the Core I program at the Las Vegas Institute is routinely reported to have given attendees a totally new and more complete perspective._