A positive alternative for needle phobic dental patients

By Heather Victoria

Up to 15 percent of the population declines necessary dental treatment, primarily because they fear oral injections. Medically known as belonephobia, and commonly referred to as “needle phobia,” a deep-seated fear of needles often first develops in early childhood and can continue into adulthood, affecting people of all ages.

For belonephobics, the mere sight of a needle can trigger a physical domino effect known as a vasovagal reaction: central nerve flares, blood pressure drops and the patient faints. Other symptoms include anxiety, panic, nausea, light-headedness, skin paleness, dizziness, shortness of breath, shakiness, profuse sweating and sometimes even loss of bladder control. Needle phobic patients’ “fight or flight” instincts go into overdrive before a needle is ever brought out.

Because people afflicted with belonephobia will go to great lengths to avoid needle pricks, it can be difficult to get them through a dental office’s doors. Many would sooner undergo general anesthesia with an IV for a dental procedure than have to suffer through the anxiety of multiple shots in the mouth. There’s only one problem — general anesthesia uses a needle too.

So what is the answer for people who can’t bear the pain and anxiety but require essential dental treatment? Oral conscious sedation dentistry offers a safe and effective alternative to general anesthesia for belonephobic patients, without the use of any additional needles. Even more, patients seldom remember the intravenous injections they receive during their procedures due to the anterograde amnesia created by the oral sedatives.

Appropriately trained dentists can use a variety of protocols to easily, comfortably and safely sedate even the most anxious and fearful needle phobic patients. Oral medication swallowed whole or crushed and administered sublingually can relax, calm and ease patients into their dental procedures.

A key strategy in combating belonephobic symptoms is relieving the pre-anxiety that occurs before an appointment. Depending on the regimen, medication also may be taken the night before and the morning of the treatment — relieving a patient’s apprehension, jitters and nervousness prior to them getting to the office.

It’s important to keep in mind that some people with needle phobia are more afraid of the pain the injection will cause than of the actual needle itself. Topical anesthetics and gels used at the injection sites can offer some relief. However, when coupled with the use of oral sedatives, they provide a positive option for combating the fear and anxiety that needle phobic patients normally feel.

Experiencing dentistry in a positive new way also may give needle phobic patients the courage to seek other medical treatments they have neglected. They tend to avoid any procedures, dental or otherwise, that involve the use of needles, delaying or skipping necessary blood tests, immunizations and even life-saving minor procedures such as skin biopsies.

Oral sedation dentistry brings belonephobic patients one step closer to conquering their fears. It gives dentists the assurance that they are providing the highest quality care possible and patients the confidence to receive the dental treatment they need.

To learn more about how to provide oral conscious sedation to patients, visit DOCSeducation.org or call (877) 325-3627.