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AAE uses Root Canal Awareness Week to dispel myths

When President Barack Obama used the phrase “as popular as a root canal” when outlining the many difficult challenges facing the nation in his first State of the Union address earlier this year, the AAE cried foul. (Photo/Whitehouse.gov)

By Fred Michmershuizen, Online Editor

E-v-e-r-y-o-n-e’s heard the jokes, the innuendos and the comparisons to unpleasant things. Nothing can be so bad, according to popular perception, as having to undergo a root canal procedure. (Except perhaps an IRS audit.) That’s why every spring, the American Association of Endodontists (AAE) holds Root Canal Awareness Week.

The idea behind the event, according to the AAE, is to help dispel long-standing myths about root canal treatment and increase the public’s understanding of the procedure as one that is virtually painless. The week also seeks to raise awareness of endodontics as a specialty and highlight the importance of endodontists.

This year in particular, the AAE used its Root Canal Awareness Week, held in the spring, to help encourage general practitioners to refer more cases to endodontists and to help patients make more informed decisions about whether to see a specialist.

With their use of advanced technologies and expertise in administering anesthesia, the AAE pointed out that endodontists perform virtually painless root canal treatments that can last a lifetime. The AAE also says that patients who require endodontic therapy should ask general dentists about the benefits of consulting an endodontist, even if the GP does not recommend a specialist.

After all, the AAE pointed out, when it comes to serious health needs, family physicians turn to specialists such as cardiologists for heart disease and podiatrists for foot troubles. However, when it comes to dentistry, general practitioners refer less than half of patients who need root canals to colleagues who specialize in the procedure, according to a recent survey by the AAE.

According to the survey, dentists refer an average of 46 percent of root canal patients to endodontists, yet almost all general dentists surveyed, 94 percent, say they have a positive or very positive perception of endodontists as well as the care they provide.

With more than 15 million root canals performed annually, the AAE used Root Canal Awareness Week — which ran March 28 to April 3 this year — to remind dental patients of the advanced pain minimizing endodontists receive for this complex dental treatment.

Reacting to remark by Obama

Speaking of the public’s perception of root canal treatment, the AAE did not let a negative reference to the procedure by President Barack Obama in his first State of the Union address earlier this year go unchecked.

Obama uttered the phrase “as popular as a root canal” when outlining the many difficult challenges facing the nation. The AAE pointed out that Obama unintentionally reinforced a myth and outdated misconception about the “unpopular” nature of root canal procedures.

“When we certainly understand the president’s intent, people need to know that root canals don’t cause pain, they relieve it,” remarked Dr. Gerald N. Glickman of the AAE, after Obama’s address. “Root canals may sound daunting, but endodontists can do this procedure quickly, efficiently and with virtually no pain involved. The result is a restored natural tooth that can last a lifetime.”

The AAE also explained that most root canal treatments can be completed in one visit and are entirely comfortable. A national consumer survey published in 2009 shows that an overwhelming majority of root canal patients use positive words to describe the experience.

According to a previous AAE poll, those who had a root canal performed by an endodontist were six times more likely to describe it as “painless” than those who had never had the procedure.
Sybron is proud to support NCOHF, an NCOHF founding underwriter, past chairman of NCOHF, said: “As care needs of underserved children.

and treat the immediate oral health promote positive health behaviors health programs and services that families through comprehensive oral to improve the oral health of local states.

ate network, the goal at TCDC is underserved pediatric patients in the and enhance oral health services for donations from two of the largest dental NCOHF recently announced it has received dental products donated dental products valued at more than $185,000 to NCOHF in 2000 to provide vital dental treatment for underserved children across the country.

Twenty-two NCOHF affiliate nonprofit oral health care centers received donated dental products throughout the year from DENTSPLY Internationals.

Christopher Clark, president and chief operating officer of NCOHF, said: “DENTSPLY is proud to serve as a longstanding partner for the NCOHF affiliate network, providing both financial and product support. “NCOHF programs for underserved children meet the goals of DENTSPLY’s corporate philanthropy by improving dental prevention, education and access to care in our most vulnerable children. Only by working together can we eliminate the oral health crisis plaguing our nation.”

“We are very grateful that DENTSPLY has been a dedicated NCOHF underwriting partner since our founding in 2006,” Ingber said. “The continued generosity of DENTSPLY, through product donations as well as financial and technical support, has played a significant role in our affiliates’ ability to reach more than 1 million children with prevention, education and treatment services that give them hope for a pain-free and bright future.”

Thanks to generous corporate underwriters such as Sybron, DENTSPLY and many others, 100 percent of all contributions to America’s Toothfairy go directly to fund life-changing oral health care for the children in the United States who need it most.

More information about NCOHF is available online at www.ncohf.org.