Abuse of information
The seventh in a series of articles on managing information

I remember an event that took place at my practice some years ago. One of my patients was an affable, mild foreigner in his mid-fifties who owned a guest-house in the ‘hood. He was a regular attendant, and his wife usually came in with him. We were all disappointed when he and his wife informed us that they were going to live abroad. Only a couple of months later, he returned alone to have an implant placed, and we were surprised by how many months he seemed to want take over the treatment.

Eventually, the treatment was completed and he returned to his wife. A few months later his wife arrived and requested a copy of his records so that she could check the financials. Fortunately, my receptionist declined to provide her with a copy of the clinical records. She demanded to see me, and then accused me of being in collusion with her husband because I would not provide her with data she requested. I was mystified until I learned that this mild affable middle-aged man was a veritable lothario who was having an affair with the hotel housekeeper, and had used the extended dental experience to justify his absence from home.

‘She called us both names that made my staff blush’

There are times when every dentist or a member of his staff is guilty of perambulating on the outskirts of veracity. This is not exactly telling lies, but it is not telling the truth either. A good example of this is when a patient phones and is told you are on a course. The fact that it is a golf course that you are on is definitely not the message you wish your patient to receive, whereas being on a course implies dedication to continuing education. We can also perambulate on the outskirts of veracity when we tell our patients that a crown could last for life or tooth whitening can last for up to three years. Both statements are true, but the likelihood is they will not. Being economical with the truth is not a good way to keep your patients informed. Quoting one set of data that supports your case while neglecting to make known another of which you are aware that does not is bad medicine.

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