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# Reconstructing Smiles

Aided by cutting-edge dental technology and a caring, long-tenured staff, Dr. Michael Sophocles serves a new generation of satisfied patients

by Theodora Malison



It was a beautiful day, perfect conditions for a father and daughter to play outside. The laughter ended abruptly when a rock accidentally hit the father in the mouth, breaking a front tooth. If this were not bad enough, the father had to attend an important wedding the following day.

His mind raced as he tried to figure out where to turn to fix this urgent problem on such short notice. The fear and panic subsided when he found the answer: the Paoli-based dental office of Michael Sophocles, D.M.D., and Associates.

"When the patient arrived, he came in and was able to have a permanent crown made by 11 a.m. that same day," Dr. Sophocles recalls. "This is the kind of cutting-edge technology we're utilizing to accomplish tasks such as this, which traditionally can't be accomplished without multiple visits."

Dr. Sophocles prides himself on running a dental practice where there is a solution to any dental problem, whether large or small. The practice offers a multitude of dentistry services, ranging from minimally invasive orthodontic procedures, laser-assisted periodontics and Invisalign to crowns, bridges and inlays to more complex procedures such as dental implants and complete smile makeovers.

Often, such as was the case with the patient who broke his tooth, Dr. Sophocles is able to provide a solution within a single visit. This kind of skill and commitment, not to mention a technology-rich environment designed to deliver positive patient outcomes, has guided the practice through two generations.

"My father was a dentist, and owned the practice since 1964," Dr. Sophocles notes. "For several years I worked alongside him, so once he retired I expanded the practice and created a larger office within the same community."

In addition to the newly developed office space, Dr. Sophocles upgraded the practice's underlying technology to better serve patients. A system known as CEREC, for example, enables the practice to mill ceramic crowns and other dental prostheses in house with the utmost speed and precision. Only 10 to 15 percent of dentists throughout the country utilize onsite mills in their practices, according to Dr. Sophocles.

"In addition to our loyal, family-based practice, we get a lot of business CEOs, actresses, sports figures, etc.; it's a pretty demanding group, so you have to be able to offer them the latest in dental technology," he says. "People come here because they don't want a visit that is rushed. Our patients want quality care. We allow an hour with our dental hygienists for routine dental cleanings. We believe it's really important to look at the big picture, not just cavities."

This "big picture" emphasis often yields life-altering treatment. One patient's routine checkup turned into a serious diagnosis after Dr. Sophocles and his

team discovered traces of oral cancer in the patient's mouth. Without proper examination and careful attention to detail, such conditions often go undiagnosed and, as a result, endanger the patient's life.

"Had we not examined the patient's tongue, there's a strong chance he wouldn't be alive today," Dr. Sophocles adds. "We're very fortunate we had the means to catch it and diagnose the cancer, and because of that, the patient was able to have major surgery completed. The numbers are pretty high as far as the number of times oral cancer goes undiagnosed in patients."

Other technologies include a 3-D scanner for the planning and placement of crowns, dental implant crowns and other procedures; an intraoral camera, which enables the practice to diagnose conditions often invisible to the naked eye; lasers for use in gum contouring; and nonmetallic, mercury-free fillings. Although the practice can accommodate any dental need, it focuses on the art of aesthetic dentistry, such as smile restorations and all-ceramic restorations. Dr. Sophocles specializes in porcelain veneers and laminates that deliver superior results in terms of alignment, color and overall presentation, with minimal disruption to the patient's natural teeth. Also, patients in need of crowns no longer have to worry about an unnatural appearance, as the technology Dr. Sophocles utilizes can effectively match the crown to the patient's surrounding teeth.

"The technology we use now makes reconstructive dentistry more patient friendly, especially if a patient needs something along the lines of a crown or a veneer," Dr. Sophocles notes. "The new technology is better for the patient and, of course, minimally invasive. Back in the day with the old-school method you'd have to carve dovetail extensions in the tooth; now we just bond to the tooth structure. It's a neat change to be able to offer our patients this advanced technology."

Dr. Sophocles has continued to build upon his knowledge base through continuing education. In addition, he has served as a consulting staff member at Paoli Hospital for more than 20 years, which, in turn, has broadened his horizons beyond dentistry.

"I trained several years with my dad and learned a lot of what I know from him," he says. "In addition I went on to continue my education in implant reconstructions and reconstruction of teeth, and later branched out to Invisalign. As for what I do at the hospital, though I'm not there too often, it's still wonderful to be a part of something larger and continue to help as many people as possible."

Dr. Sophocles attributes much of the practice's success to his staff, which includes a team of highly trained hygienists and assistants, as well as a periodontist who makes weekly visits. The hygienists have been with the practice for a total of 25 years.

"We're extremely customer service oriented," says Dr. Sophocles, adding that the practice offers flexible hours to accommodate patients' busy schedules. "Patient satisfaction is our main priority and, in part, how we grow from great referrals by other patients."

Dr. Sophocles expects the practice to continue to flourish. In fact, he hopes his passion for his work rubs off on the next generation so his children can lead the practice into the future.

"Since we've been a family business since 1964, I would love to someday see one of my two sons get into the business, if possible," he says. "It's a hard job and physically demanding on your body, but I love my job, love the staff and love the patients I see. It's important to love what you do in this day and age."