

FASCINATING & REWARDING WORK

Not long ago, a woman in her late 50s was referred to Spooner Physical Therapy's Scottsdale location by her dentist. "She could not open her mouth wide enough to insert even one finger," explained Professional Education Coordinator Jacqui Lockwood, PT, DPT, OCS, CSCS. "She had a functional 15 millimeter opening and her entire life was affected. She suffered from chronic head pain and reported great difficulty performing the most basic of tasks such as talking and eating."

After six one-hour sessions with Ms. Lockwood and her team of three physical therapist colleagues comprising hands-on treatment, take-home exercises and the use of educational literature, the patient was brought to a 35mm opening. "Not true functional range at forty millimeters," noted Ms. Lockwood, "but life-changing nonetheless. Her pain was significantly reduced and she is now aware of forward-head posture and how it impacts various portions of the anatomy."

The patient remained in treatment for several more months with the physical therapy team and her dentist, who

prescribed a device she wears at all times. "The combination of treatments," Ms. Lockwood added, "has been effective in alleviating her discomfort and virtually giving her life back. The appliance provides an opportunity for alignment, and we provided treatment and re-education of the muscle surrounding the joint. We are proud to be part of the dental team... it's fascinating and rewarding work!"

TODAY'S TMJ

With the increasing number of hours Americans spend at their computers at work, home and elsewhere (think Internet cafes, coffee shops, airplanes, etc.), poor posture in the form of rounded shoulders and a forward-tilting head has been directly linked to neck and shoulder pain as well as headaches and repetitive use syndromes.

In cases of Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction, poor posture, Ms. Lockwood explained, is a "proven factor" in changing mechanical function. "Rounded shoulders are often the result of prolonged use of the hands placed in front of the body and this does not apply only to computer users. We see dental professionals affected, and sometimes suffering, as well. As one works in a hunched position for a prolonged period of time, their anterior shoulder muscles tighten and cause the shoulders to round forward in a protracted position. To compensate for this, patients typically extend their upper neck, causing a forward head posture and further complicating the issue."

According to Ms. Lockwood, some 80% of patients diagnosed with TMJ Dysfunction are female, 80% have forward head posture and 20% have true malocclusion. "It is typical," she added, "to see patients with Class Two and Class Three TMJ Dysfunction due to muscular forces. The most interesting thing about treating TMJ is that the body wants to level the eyes, and the jaw follows. Our job is to discover what's causing the off alignment. Yes, it could be the jaw, and we are trained to know what normal dentition should look like. But it could also be the back, hip or leg. Just as dental



L-R: Physical therapists Melanie Wrench, Jacqui Lockwood, Eric Loiland and Matt Shuey.

professionals take the time to get to know their patients, we do the same. Learning about a patient's medical history and how he or she spends time can lead to many discoveries."

TEAM COMMUNICATION

Should a dentist diagnose a patient with TMJ Dysfunction and refer that patient for physical therapy treatment, Ms. Lockwood recommends constant communication, including follow-up to assure the patient is following physical therapy recommendations and discussing with the patient whether the physical therapist(s) has:

- Inquired about the patient's lifestyle, habits and routines at home and work.
- Taught the patient postural, stretching and strengthening exercises.
- Checked the patient's range of motion including arms, neck and jaw.
- Provided education and support materials.
- Assigned at-home exercises.

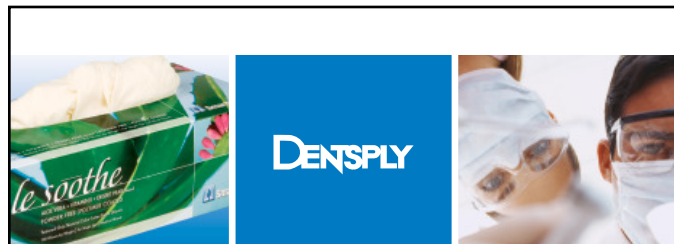


Ms. Lockwood and Mr. Loiland demonstrate one of the therapeutic exercises they teach patients being treated for TMJ Dysfunction

"We don't know what dentists learn in school," Ms. Lockwood concluded, "but we know that cervical pain and neck dysfunction often wind up being TMJ Dysfunction. In some cases, the patient comes to see us first and we refer him or her to a TMJ specialist. Physical therapists can be an adjunct to the dental team in many ways including assistance in areas such as habit and diet modification, positioning and posture and stress management.

"We hope this article will help the members of the Arizona Dental Association to gain a greater understanding and awareness that collaborating with physical therapists can open an avenue for greater service and patient satisfaction."

Denise Rucci is Managing Director-Communications & Marketing for the Arizona Dental Association and Managing Editor of INSCRIPTIONS.



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