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## In Good Health Teeth, terror and Mr. Tickle

May 25, 2006

While researching the story published today on a local dentist who performs hospital dentistry -- treating patients under general anesthesia -- I talked to a number of people about why they fear the dentist.

All had decided to have major dental work performed in the operating room by Dr. Harvey Levy because they feared they would be unable to endure hours of treatment while conscious.

Marlene Hackley, whose daughter Annette Cooper works for Dr. Levy, said her dental phobia has roots in grade school when her local dentist would come to examine the students' teeth. She developed a fear after watching the lines of students march down to the basement, where the dentist worked.

She said she can put her reservations aside for simple procedures, such as a checkup. She even can tolerate what most people dread:--the needle.

"But when that sound of the drill starts, that petrifies me," Ms. Hackley said. "Oh my God -- I'm done."

Frederick resident Charles "Buddy" May developed anxiety after several painful dental visits as a child and in the Air Force.

"Like most people, I'm very fearful and scared because of the pain ... because of the needles and the drilling," he said.

Traditional sedation measures, such as nitrous oxide, made him extremely ill several years ago, he said, furthering his anxiety.

Nicole Owens, a Frederick woman included in the story, developed a dental phobia years ago after she felt pain during dental procedures. She said she'd rather have labor pains than go to the dentist.

Ms. Owens said she has 17 tattoos and a nose ring, but finds the sound of a dental drill intolerable.

Fear often has no logic.

Many people I interviewed or read about said that because they were afraid of the dentist, they didn't go for checkups, and their teeth became severely decayed.

I have to keep in mind that not everyone is raised with a healthy dental hygiene model. I mentioned in a previous notebook that my father is a dentist -- I suppose that helps one manage dental phobia. Though I do not enjoy dental work, I was trained early on to face the beast, as it were.

It hasn't always been easy. To prepare for braces as a youngster, I had to have nine teeth extracted. That's right -- nine. (Would have been 10, but I managed to pull one out myself.) I've also endured cavity fillings and teeth and gum reshaping. Fun stuff.

The more serious procedures always began with what I most dread -- an injection. Having a needle enter the tissues of my gums is barely tolerable. Where exactly is the needle going? How far in? An injection into the roof of your mouth feels like the "roof" is buckling, crowding and preparing to fall in.

As much as I might want to cry or whine, my fear of oral injections pales in comparison to a scolding from my dad to "buck up." Unfortunately for him, he can't take that tough-love approach with those who aren't his children.

I recognize that in many ways I'm blessed he didn't tolerate poor behavior from me; I believe it prevented me from developing dental phobia, which paralyzes so many.

It also helps that I refer to the sound of the dreaded drill as "Mr. Tickle."

What's happening in health

- Reminder to refrain from burning between June 1 and Aug. 31. Small recreational fires, such as campfires or barbecues, are permitted, according to the Frederick County Health Department. This is part of an annual ban issued by the Maryland State Air Quality regulations, aimed at reducing ozone levels during the summer months.

Those found in violation can be fined up to \$500 for open burning without a permit, according to the health department. For details, contact the health department at 301-694-1717.

- Volunteer Frederick and the Frederick County Health Department are calling for volunteers to participate in a drill of a quick dispensing center. The drill will provide training for emergency situations that require mass distribution of medications, according to the health department.

The drill will be held June 14 from 9 a.m. to noon. For details and location, contact Jack Lynch of Volunteer Frederick at 301-663-5214 or e-mail [jacklynch@volunteerfrederick.org](mailto:jacklynch@volunteerfrederick.org).

### **Health tip of the week**

Dental-phobes take note -- you're not alone. Several Web sites exist to help you address your fears and work to overcome them. My favorite site is [www.dentalfearcentral.org](http://www.dentalfearcentral.org), which includes a list of possible fears, causes and ways to handle them.