

WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE

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"It's just going to be one of those days, isn't it"? Dr. Stan Jennings had to smile to himself when he saw the name of his next patient. He sighed, "Some patients are just more challenging than others."

JAMIE GATES

Jamie Gates was just one of those patients who always seemed to require more effort to satisfy. He arrived at Dr. Jennings' operatory over a year earlier due to some poorly done root canals that ultimately led to the loss of three teeth. Jamie appeared at the dental clinic to resolve these issues with implants since the cost would be more affordable if done by a dental resident instead of a private practitioner. Dr. Jennings supervised the surgical placement and delivery of three screw-retained implant crowns by one of the dental residents. Unfortunately, Jamie failed to return for follow-up visits once the implant crowns were delivered.

After several months passed, Dr. Jennings noticed Jamie's name on his schedule and was interested to see why he'd been gone for so long.

After a few minutes of small talk, Jamie said, "My bite's not quite right and my dentist told me to come back here and get you to adjust my implants."

Dr. Jennings was surprised. The dentist that Jamie was listening to was the same one who did the faulty root canals that led to his implants. The fact that he didn't understand that the requested adjustments to the implants could harm them was another disheartening insight into his knowledge of contemporary dentistry.

Dr. Jennings considered his words before explaining to Jamie that adjusting the implants could lead them to fail. He encouraged him to consider other options, even complete replacement, if they were truly bothering him.

Jamie refused to hear any of Dr. Jennings' suggestions and became more and more pushy and argumentative with each explanation. Finally, Dr. Jennings decided to have him sign an informed consent that documented Dr. Jennings' hesitation to do the adjustments before agreeing to allow the minor adjustments that Jamie wanted. In the end, Jamie asked for several adjustments that ultimately led to one of the prosthetic screws failing as Dr. Jennings predicted.

Several weeks later, an attorney contacted Dr. Jennings at the dental clinic and requested Jamie's records. Understandably, Dr. Jennings' heart raced until the lawyer said that Jamie was happy with the clinic's work. She said that Jamie had contacted her because he blamed the other dentist for giving bad advice.

Dr. Jennings felt a bit relieved but still recognized that he needed legal help. After several meetings with his counsel, Jamie's records were released and Dr. Jennings sent a letter notifying him that he'd been released as a patient from the dental clinic.

Months passed with no further word from Jamie or his attorneys. Dr. Jennings continued to mentor and train his students with no follow-ups from any lawyers. Then, one morning, Dr. Jennings stopped dead in his tracks. Looking into an operatory, he saw Jamie Gates sitting in one of the chairs being examined by a dental student. Dr. Jennings gasped and thought, "Why is he back in our office?!? Didn't we ban him from further procedures? Why is he with one of our providers? How do I stop this? Should I stop this?"