

THE NEW DENTIST

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Dr. Brian Williams is a recent dental graduate working as the only dentist within a two-hour range of any specialty dental practices. The event involves an emergency patient that presents in significant discomfort. While evaluating the patient and taking into consideration his needs, Dr. Williams must decide whether he wishes to start a procedure that he may not have the adequate skills to perform.

INTRODUCTION

“Please, you got to help me I can’t bear this anymore! There’s no way I can drive two hours to get this fixed!” the patient said while rolling his eyes. While this was taking place, Dr. Williams observed the patient opening his Facebook account and posting that he was in the chair frustrated, waiting for dental treatment to start.

Dr. Brian Williams was in his early thirties and had just graduated from a southeastern dental school. Working most summers as a dental assistant, he felt like he had the practical experience to start a dental practice from scratch back in his home town of Townsville. A small town, it was about two hours away from the “big” city and he would be the only dentist for miles. He did not realize the stressful situations that he would experience during his first year open.

THE EMERGENCY APPOINTMENT

Dr. Williams had been open for two months when his front desk asked him if it would be ok to add an emergency at the end of the day. He knew that in order to build his practice reputation, he needed to be accommodating. He decided to go ahead and put the emergency on the schedule and hoped he could help the person in need.

His emergency patient, John Crawford, arrived slightly early and it soon became obvious that he was in a significant amount of discomfort. A longtime resident of Townsville, he hated the dentist and only came when he was having an issue. It also didn’t help that he had to drive so far to reach one, so he was happy to hear a dentist had recently opened a practice in his town. Everything had been fine until Saturday

when his tooth began to throb. The pain increased daily to the point he was eating Tylenol like candy. Calling the new office, he was for the first time happy to see a dentist. He arrived early just in case they had an opening and he completed the required paperwork. The pain in his tooth had become unrelenting. In the waiting room, he paced back and forth and held his jaw while wincing in pain. As soon as the last patient was finished, the dental staff brought him into a consult room and sat him down for Dr. Williams to evaluate the situation.

“What seems to be the problem sir?” Dr. Williams asked.

“This tooth is killing me; I haven’t slept in three days. I need this tooth removed.” The patient pointed to a lower molar with his finger.

“Let me get an X-ray and perform an exam. Then we can then talk about our options.” Dr. Williams said.

After the x-ray, Dr. Williams tapped on the tooth and the patient flinched in agony.

“Well, you are right, it is this back molar. Looks like you have a big cavity in it. We can either do a root canal or remove the tooth. I would suggest trying to hold onto it since you chew on that tooth a good bit.” Dr. Williams said.

“I can’t afford to and I just want to be out of pain, please just remove it,” the patient quickly replied.

As Dr. Williams examined the x-ray, his heart began to race. He was never good at extractions and this tooth looked very difficult. The roots were very long and the nerve for the jaw looked like it was right next to the tooth. Dr. Williams knew you should never try to push someone into a treatment that they don’t want but decided to give it one last try. “I really think you ought to consider holding onto that tooth. I would hate for you to regret losing it a few months down the road. Once the tooth is gone, it’s gone.”

“Doc, please just take it out, I can’t take the pain anymore.” The patient said.

“Well the tooth has really long roots and I am worried it will be hard to get out.” Dr. Williams stated.

The patient interrupted and began to cry, “Please, you got to help me I can’t bear this anymore! There’s no way I can drive two hours to get this fixed!” The patient started to reposition himself in the chair and rolled his eyes. While this was taking place, Dr. Williams noticed the patient opening his Facebook account and posting

that he was frustrated, waiting to get the dental treatment he needed to get out of pain. “Hurry up and wait” his post said.

THE DILEMMA

Dr. Williams thought to himself: *I want to help him, but am I going to get in over my head? What if I damage that nerve? What is best for the patient? The nearest oral surgeon is over two hours away...what should I do? What if he posts more negative comments online and it hurts the reputation of my office?*