

PARANOID PATIENT

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For a dental student, there is no harder task than fabricating the first set of dentures for a patient. Fourth year dental student, Carol was discovering how hard this task could be while treating her paranoid patient, Tom. Nearing the end of treatment, Carol realized that she had no idea just how paranoid Tom was until he reveals a handgun that he carries to the clinic for protection in the “unsafe” downtown area.

The art of making complete dentures is a daunting task no matter the skill level of the provider. But making your first set of complete dentures as a dental student is a major undertaking. It is a right-of-passage that no other experience can replace. Not only does it require lots of appointments and countless laboratory hours, it often requires the student to redo many steps along the way. So once a dental student nears the end result, he or she is extremely ready to have the prosthesis completed! There is nothing like having your first set of dentures checked off by your instructor and have the patient leave with a smile, while you, as a student, have the deep satisfaction of completing a major requirement for graduation.

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As a fourth year dental student, Carol was finishing her first set of dentures for Tom, an elderly gentleman from a small, rural town in Missouri. Tom always entertained her with a joke or a story and he wore the same tattered black leather vest to every appointment. He consistently arrived early (by three hours!) to every appointment because he was afraid of getting caught in traffic, and he only scheduled morning appointments because he believed downtown Springfield was very dangerous at night. It seemed that he reminded Carol of this danger at every appointment, but she believed he worried about her as a single, young, female from out-of-state living alone downtown. Other than the safety issue, Carol never really thought much about his peculiarities until the day of his try-in appointment for the wax trial denture.

The wax trial denture try-in is the next-to-last appointment before dentures are delivered. It is a trial run to let a patient look at the teeth and change the tooth arrangement as needed. This appointment was nerve wracking for dental students because it often resulted in an-

other wax trial denture try-in appointment -- extending the number of appointments once again. Much to Carol's delight, she slipped Tom's old dentures out and slipped in the wax trial dentures. They were perfect! Carol was pleased, Tom was pleased, and all the points that the instructors would be looking for checked out. It was a good day for her as a dental student and she happily called for the instructor to do a final check. This was a big day that Carol had been waiting for!

Unfortunately, the clinic was extremely busy and only one, instead of two, instructors were there to cover the clinic. Since the line to get approval was very long, Carol and Tom had plenty of time to chat. As usual, Tom went on and on about how dangerous downtown Springfield was but Carol decided that she'd had enough with his talk about the "dangerous" downtown.

Carol looked at Tom and said, "Wow, it really must have changed because I just don't see it as unsafe here as you make it out to be."

As she finished speaking, Carol watched Tom reach inside the leather vest he wore at each appointment and slowly pull out a small, hand-held revolver. Tom turned to Carol and said, "If I need to carry a gun to downtown Springfield, you better bet it's dangerous."

Carol immediately panicked, but not about the gun. Instead, she started worrying about how she would ever get her denture requirement checked off. She knew there was a strict, no handgun policy on campus and knew that if anyone else saw the gun she would not get to continue seeing her patient. As these thoughts swirled through her head, Carol tried to maintain her composure. *What should I do???*