

Dear Dr. McCrummen: I recently went to three different dentists for their opinion. I got three different recommendations. Why aren't all dentists going to say the same thing? I really don't know what I need to have done now, and costs really vary. Should I choose a younger or older dentist? Cheaper or more expensive? C.E.

Not knowing if you had one specific problem, or if you went for a complete examination, I can only generalize. If a person wants second or third opinions they are usually expecting different views of the problem, and choices to choose from. This helps you to make a more informed decision on treatment.

The very best way to start is with a "comprehensive evaluation". The doctor needs to look at everything thoroughly; teeth, gums, bite, TMJ, complete and current x-rays, general oral condition, dental and general health history, esthetics, habits, concerns, etc. Everything seen as abnormal should be noted. You should be informed of the findings, and fully understand what is discussed and your options.

All dentists are the same so they should come up with the same treatment and costs, right? Definitely not! We all went to different schools and we were taught differently, and with different emphasis on what and how to do things. We go to different continuing education courses each year, listen to different speakers, and learn different techniques. We use different equipment, different dental materials, and different laboratories. Training and learning doesn't end when we graduate. It goes on as long as we practice. We find out what works best for us and our patients, and we learn to be comfortable and confident with what we recommend and do. Then, many of us change as new materials, equipment, and techniques change. Dentistry is the fastest changing health profession and it is good to keep up.

Each dentist may look at a problem in a different way, and have a different solution. Some may choose to watch a small problem until it gets bigger. Some may let you know that treating a small problem is cheaper, and leaves a tooth stronger, or gums healthier. Some may recommend the longest lasting solution, which may also be the most expensive. Some dentists may refer you to a specialist because they may have even more training and experience with your problem. With experience and knowledge the dentist will have a better idea of the likely outcome, because they have seen the results over time.

Do you choose a younger dentist because they have just learned the latest techniques in school, or an older dentist because they have more experience and training, and have learned more over the years? That is a difficult question. We are all capable of solving the same problems but maybe in a different way. Trust is a very important thing to have when you work with anyone. If there is no trust you may always be leery, and never be quite happy. Choose trust, comfort, and compassion as your guidelines, and look for, and expect, high quality. If cost is a concern be informed as to why more expensive solutions will be a benefit for you over cheaper solutions. Most of us

eventually learn that "you get what you pay for". Your long-term health and comfort are very important.

My suggestion is to go where it feels right, become fully informed, be sure you understand all that you feel you need to know, and trust the dentist help you in the best way they know. A good dentist will recommend what is best for the patient. Be sure you understand why a recommendation is made, and be sure your dentist knows your concerns and wishes. Your dentist is there to help you.