

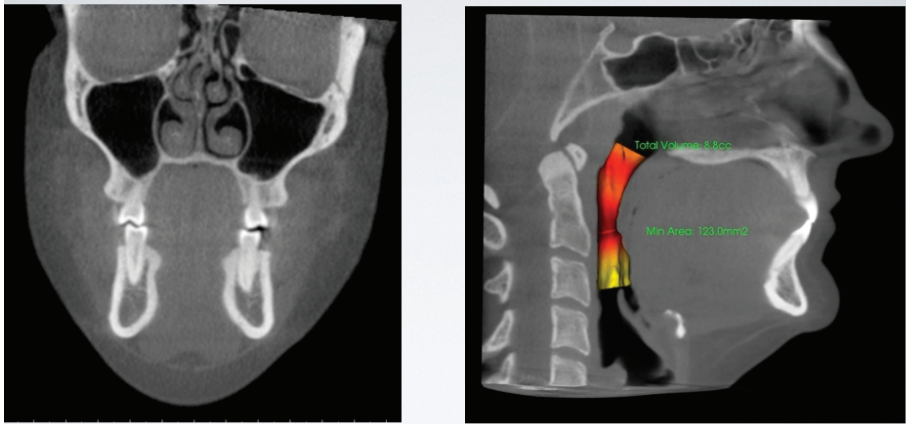
How Your Dentist Can Help you Sleep Better

AIRWAY ISSUES including Sleep Apnea were historically very hard to identify and diagnose. Thanks to new technology, there has been rapid advancement in the dental industry through examination and imaging that make the clinical signs and symptoms very easy to identify. Did you know that dentists can and should play a key role in the integrative care of patients with sleep related breathing disorders? More and more of them are educating themselves on how to screen and identify serious medical conditions as well as airway issues that lead to poor sleep habits and deteriorating health. Dentists and dental hygienists are the only healthcare providers that get a chance to spend one hour with their patients twice a year, not to mention working directly in the airway! This creates an opportunity to educate patients on the importance of airway development, good quality sleep and proper breathing.

Sleep apnea, mouth breathing, and Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMD/TMJ) are part of an inter-related web of cause and effect that governs our ability to eat, speak, and breathe. When an individual does not get enough quality sleep, they put themselves at risk for a multitude of potentially serious illnesses. Heart attack, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes are just a few of the potential dangers. Everyone knows what it feels like to not get enough sleep at night. The scary thing is that insufficient sleep has been linked to motor vehicle and work-related accidents, as well as medical errors. In the long-term, poor sleep habits are linked to chronic diseases, increased mortality and overall reduced quality of life.

The most crucial aspect while screening patients is ensuring that the process is explained prior to the examination. This process includes an extensive medical history evaluation, a sleep questionnaire known as an Epworth Sleepiness Scale, as well as a comprehensive oral examination. A few of the oral signs that a Dentist will see correlating to sleep breathing disorders are; scalloped tongue, crowded teeth, large tonsils, narrowed dental arches, and wear on the teeth from grinding at night. The American Sleep Apnea Association (ASAA) states “up to 80 percent of moderate and severe obstructive sleep apnea cases are undiagnosed”. Therefore, more den-

NOSE AND AIRWAY



*Fitzpatrick, M.F. European Respiratory Journal. Effect of Nasal or Oral Breathing Route on Upper Airway Resistance During Sleep
*Rhee, Weaver. Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery. Clinical consensus statement: Diagnosis and management of nasal valve compromise.

tal providers find themselves in an opportune position to identify the signs and recommend further evaluation.

Advancements in CBCT and digital X-Ray technology specifically has bridged the gap between Dental and Medical Providers. Utilizing this technology Doctors can do an analysis viewing the airway volume, TMJ, and nasal complex. These 3-D scans and images have drastically increased the communication between these two professions and patients are seeing life changing results. The medical and dental communities previously operated within their own respective fields and patients were falling through the cracks and not being treated. The future consists of a multidisciplinary approach between dentists and medical providers to work hand in hand to ensure patients are receiving the care that they deserve and help ensure that their quality of life and overall health is restored. ■



Ryan P. Robinson, DDS
Diplomate, American Board of
Craniofacial Dental Sleep Medicine