Three Tips to Help You Choose a Great Family Dentist

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Your dentist is more than just the person who cleans your teeth. Your dentist is an important partner in your family's healthcare team. A good dentist can help you prevent dental problems, spot oral cancers, and help improve your overall health by keeping your teeth and gums healthy. That's why it's important to find a good family dentist.

While it's true that the term "good" can be subjective, there are objective measures by which one can assess a potential family dentist. Use these three tips, along with your own personal criteria for a good family dentist, to find your family's next healthcare partner.

Three Tips for Assessing a Family Dentist

1. **What are the dentist's credentials and experience?**

Dentists in the United States must graduate from an accredited dental school and pass both written and practical exams. Ask what credentials the dentist has or look on his website to examine his credentials. Also note whether or not all the dentists in the practice, if it's an office with multiple dentists, have the same level of experience and credentials. It's also important for dentists to continue their education after graduation. Like any healthcare field, new discoveries are being made all the time. Your family dentist should be keeping up with them.

Ask questions when you call the office. Do you need a dentist who treats children and teens as well as adults? Make sure you ask, because there are some family dentists who prefer not to work with very young children; they may only accept school age children and older as patients, and refer younger children to a pediatric dentist.

Do your children need braces as well as routine care? Some family dental offices offer braces as well as cleanings, fillings, and other routine services. This can be a great time saver for a busy family.

What about people who suffer from dental phobias and fears? There are some dentists who welcome patients with phobias and fears and offer special services such as sedation dentistry, movie or music to distract patients, nitrous oxide and other services to help them feel relaxed. If you need these services, don't be afraid to ask before you make your appointment! A good dentist wants you to feel comfortable during your visit, and his office staff should welcome your questions.

2. **What's the office like?**

When you call the office, is the receptionist rude and rushed or pleasant and helpful? Is he patient when answering questions or curt? Can he or she answer all your questions regarding appointment times, services, insurance and payments?
You can tell a lot about an office by the person staffing the front desk. That person plays an important role in any professional setting, but most of all in a medical or dental office. If the front office person is rude or condescending, you may be too intimidated to ask for what you need -- not a good situation if you have a dental emergency.

Some family dentists offer a free initial appointment, and such an appointment can help you assess the office. Does the dentist use the latest equipment? A state of the art office means a dentist who cares about learning and using the latest techniques, tools and equipment for his patients' comfort and convenience.

Lastly, is the office conveniently located? You're going to be more likely to keep appointments if the office is convenient to your home, school or workplace.

3. How does the dentist's office fit your family's needs?

Each family is different. You may have very young children at home, or perhaps children plus an aging parent living with you. It may be helpful to create a checklist of your needs such as:

- Pediatric dentistry - for my baby and preschooler
- Orthodontics for my young teenager
- General dental care for myself, my spouse
- Dentures and a handicapped accessible office for my mom who lives with us

Another point you may wish to check is the availability of multiple appointments during one time slot. An office with several dentists may be able to accommodate a request for all of your family's appointments during one time slot. That can be a great convenience.

Finding a Great Family Dentist

You can find a great family dentist by asking friends, family or neighbors for recommendations. An online search for local dentists can lead you to some great potential dentists to research, and provide you with an easy and convenient way to find out more information about their practices by visiting their websites.

Whatever you do, though, take your time, and choose your family dentist carefully. A good dentist is a pleasure to visit, a professional who will take care of your family's dental needs with confidence and skill. A great family dentist becomes an integral member of your healthcare team, a trusted resource to keep everyone smiling and healthy.

About the Author
Dr. Scott Shamblott, D.D.S., F.A.G.D., F.D.O.C.S., is a Hopkins, Minnesota area family dentist and the owner of Shamblott Family Dentistry. Dr. Shamblott was awarded his DDS degree with high distinction from the University of Minnesota, and has advanced training in conscious sedation, IV sedation, and many other fields. Many dentists refer dental phobic patients to Dr. Shamblott, knowing that his kind, professional demeanor will help fearful patients feel at ease and receive the dental treatment they need. Dr. Shamblott welcomes patients to his Minneapolis-area practice from throughout the Twin Cities and Western Wisconsin and offers a wide range of family dental services including emergency dentistry, children's dentistry, general and family dentistry, extractions, root canal treatments, cosmetic dentistry, orthodontics, cosmetic braces and more. Visit www.shamblottfamilydentistry.com to learn more or to make an appointment.