

# Inside Dentistry

December 2012

Volume 8, Issue 12



December 2012, Volume 8, Issue 12  
Published by AEGIS Communications

## A Miracle of Collaborative Giving

A smile makeover gives new hope to a cancer patient.

By David Ward, DMD

I've often had patients come and go with very little fanfare. It's not that I don't want to know more about my patients' personal lives; it's just that the day's pace leaves me with precious little time to ask more than the typical superficial questions: How are the kids? How is your spouse? Congratulations on your new baby!

But on a rather ordinary day in March 2011, I met an extraordinary person. At the age of 55, Roger decided it was time to get the smile he always wanted. After cursory introductions and greetings, I sensed Roger's uneasiness and asked about his health and medical information. He told me he'd recently seen a doctor for a medical problem and needed more tests. They suspected cancer.

But Roger quickly became more upbeat and began opening up about his desire for a better smile. It was immediately clear that we'd have a great relationship and I'd enjoy providing him with a new smile.

After discussing his goals and desires for his smile, we started discussing a budget. We obviously wouldn't be able to complete the full plan of crowns and veneers he'd hoped for due to financial constraints, but we agreed on a staged treatment over a period of time. Roger left after chatting with just about everyone on my team, which became a common occurrence that we all came to enjoy during the course of his treatment.

## Keep Moving Forward

A week or so later, Roger arrived for his impressions and photographs so that a wax-up could be created. At this appointment, he was much more introverted and serious. In tears, he told me he'd been diagnosed with stage IV liver cancer and esophageal cancer.

I asked if he wanted to wait to begin his smile makeover and he responded, "Wait for what? This is something I have always wanted and I am not going to let this stop me."

I talked with Collette, my patient care coordinator, and we decided that maybe we could help Roger in some way. It's not very often in life that you meet someone who you both instantly like and want to help in any way you can.

# Generosity is Contagious

Knowing that Roger would probably get sick, miss work, have medical bills, and become overwhelmed by his situation, we thought the best thing to do was donate our treatment for Roger. This way he'd only have to worry about the laboratory bill.

I contacted Steven Sidmore, my local Microdental (MAC) Laboratory representative, to ask if they could provide some type of discount. Steve and I had become great friends at a veneer course a few years earlier. In less than 3 hours, he was on the phone with Collette to say they decided to do the whole case, everything in our treatment plan, for free.

I was stunned, but not surprised.

## The Journey

So it began. Wax-ups. Chemotherapy. Maxillary preparations and temporaries. Chemotherapy. Impressions. Chemotherapy. And then nothing.

Roger had to cancel his appointments to recover from the physical onslaught on his body. Through it all, he was upbeat, positive, and grateful for everything that was being done for him.

Roger disappeared for a few months after we finished the maxillary arch. The cancer, or more specifically the treatment, left him tired and weak. I received periodic updates from my brother, who lives on the same street as Roger. My brother informed me that Roger received bad news. The first chemotherapy treatment did little to stop the cancer and the prognosis was grim. He spoke in terms of months, not years. Everyone in the office was devastated. We were glad we could help Roger, but it seemed we were powerless to do more for him.

Toward the end of the summer, Roger stopped by to chat and let us know he was feeling better. He looked much more like his old self and wanted to continue with the lower arch. We were happy to get started and delighted to see him looking so well. He explained he'd been placed into a trial at Dana Farber and was hoping for a miracle. So were we!

## A Holiday Miracle

We finished Roger's treatment just before the holidays in 2011. He left hugging everyone and repeating that it was the best present he could ever receive.

Roger recently stopped in for a cleaning, looking quite good and feeling even better. He admitted to having good and bad days and he realizes that every day is a gift. But Roger is a gift himself. He taught my team and me so much about what's important in life and what's not worth worrying about. His smile lights up the room, and he inspires everyone he comes in contact with.

No one knows what the future holds for our friend Roger. The last time I saw him, he said the doctors told him that his counts were unbelievable. His doctor said, "A miracle." Who knows? One thing is for sure: Roger was a small miracle to all of us who touched his life. Hopefully his new smile will continue bringing joy and hope to all those he meets, and the miracles keep coming.

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