



JUST BECAUSE

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Just because a mendacious mockumentary claims all root canal treated teeth are a health hazard does not justify the public partaking in an orgy of extractions as they did at the beginning of the previous century. This is the focal infection theory rearing its ugly head once again. This theory was able to flourish because our understanding of the cause of most diseases was naïve or blatantly erroneous. At that time, the medical profession theorized schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and a number of other 'ailments' were due to infections elsewhere in the body. Common culprits were the tonsils, sinuses, ovaries, testicles, appendix, gall bladder, spleen, stomach, and colon. A thorough lavage or removal of the offending body part was common practice and certainly in vogue for the nouveau riche. Early in the twentieth century, medicine was strictly fee for service and only the upper crust of society could afford such 'cutting edge' treatment.

In 1910 x-rays began to be used in dental practices. This led to the discovery of a plethora of asymptomatic periapical radiolucencies in healthy and unhealthy patients. Hence, it was no great leap of faith to add infected teeth to the list of disease causing sites. Physicians would routinely prescribe extraction of infected and healthy teeth in the hope of curing a systemic disease. As a cure-all, is it not more palatable economically and socially to have one's teeth extracted rather than spleen or bladder surgically removed? A group of dentists and physicians were so enthusiastic they became known as the 100%'ers; they routinely espoused extraction of all teeth in order to ensure a lifetime of health.

Just because this was popular and highly touted by so called 'experts' does not portend successful outcomes for the converted. Tens of thousands of patients were actually worse off for having their teeth, tonsils, or other parts removed. Not deterred by inconsistent results the true believers claimed an unrecognized focus was to blame and a cure was merely a sinus lavage or another organ removal away. After a gastric lavage and full mouth clearance proved ineffective many patients unsurprisingly opted out of a colectomy and castration as follow-up procedures. Over the decades, umpteen controlled clinical trials have proven treatment not based on the focal infection theory to be successful and predictable. In the 1930's, the gleam of focal infection-based treatment began to fade due to a lack of 'cured' cases and a glut of deleterious side effects. Clinicians began to recommend less speculative approaches to health care. Officialdom was slow to add its weight to the fallacies of focal infection-based treatment. A 1952 editorial in the Journal of American Medical Association stated "many patients with diseases presumably caused by foci of infection have not been relieved of their symptoms by removal of the foci, many patients with these same systemic diseases have no evidence of a focus of infection, foci of infection are as common in apparently healthy persons as in those with disease."

In defence of teeth and the small bacteria they may harbour it is interesting to note infective endocarditis is more likely to result from exposure to random bacteremias occurring with activities of daily living than from bacteremias due to dental, gastrointestinal or urinary tract procedures. In 2007, the American Heart Association as well as the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy severely curtailed their prophylactic antimicrobial recommendations for invasive dental treatment. Unlike previous recommendations there was verifiable evidence supporting the new approach.

It is not possible nor desirable to live a bacteria-free life. No root canal treatment is able to sterilize a tooth but successful treatment does not pose a health risk. Blaming a root canal treated tooth for impotence, as was claimed in the mockumentary, is analogous to blaming the ice in a gin and tonic at the captain's table for the iceberg that sunk the Titanic. Root canal treated teeth are not a health risk and there is evidence to support that statement. Be wary and hold on tight to your wallet when modern-day avaricious snake oil salesmen claim your teeth are the root cause of all your ills and they have just the cure for you and your aura.

Regards,



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