

Feature: New Options for Flossing



Cindy Kleiman shares a story of providing a patient with a much-needed Sonicare Airfloss.



Recently my friend John^{*} was playing racquetball, and he not only lost the point, but also his balance. He found he couldn't speak; he was having a seizure! Luckily, racquetball is played with a partner, so John's problem was quickly recognized and EMS was called immediately. In the hospital, the doctors ran tests and discovered a brain tumor. In 2011, more than 64,000 new cases of primary brain and central nervous system tumors, both malignant and non-malignant, are expected to be diagnosed.[†] When people receive the diagnosis of cancer, their lives are changed forever. They are faced with a gauntlet of doctors and treatment decisions. Fortunately, John's tumor was operable, and he decided on surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. He is fighting that tumor with full force.

Maintaining John's oral hygiene and oral health is important as he undergoes the rigors of surgery and subsequent treatment. Following brain surgery, John was left with paresis (weakness) on his right (dominant) side, with incremental improvements gradually occurring with the help of physical and occupational therapy. His oral hygiene challenges are daunting, but products like the new Sonicare AirFloss and power toothbrushes for example, make the job much easier using his left hand. Flossing is a totally different story.

For years, we have taught patients to brush and floss, with the words "interproximal cleaning" not yet in our vocabulary. Disposable flossers and interdental or interproximal picks did not yet exist. Today our options are substantial and expanding. Non-compliant patients or those with dexterity problems have a versatile array of products to assist them.

Even though John's dexterity is improving, he needs help, so I provided him with the new Sonicare AirFloss. In evaluating the options available, I decided on the AirFloss because the tip placement does not need to be exact to be effective. In addition, the larger handle size makes it easy to hold with a non-dominant hand. Later on, John can use his old favorite products or he might continue to use the products he is using now.

With cancer, so many decisions and treatments are out of one's control. With modifications, the patient can provide his own oral hygiene care and feel in control. When facing illness, giving up independence is very difficult. Needing to ask for help can be a new and embarrassing experience. Anytime a hygienist can make a patient independent in his own care, it is truly a rewarding part of the job. We are fortunate to be working in a field where we have opportunities to do this.

I am hopeful for John's future. The therapists have John practicing holding and swinging a racquetball racquet. He will know that life is good again when he is able to get back out on the court. I don't think it will take long.

*Name has been changed.
†Reference:
† Central Brain Tumor Registry of the US, www.cbtrus.org/factsheet

Author's Bio

Cindy Kleiman graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and has worked with medically compromised patients for more than 25 years. She provides CE programs internationally and can be reached at cindyspeaking@gmail.com.



Add Comment