

Dental anxiety is not a new topic.

Still, it seems that every year, more and more decisions in dental practices are made based on avoiding dental anxiety. Nearly every aspect of today's patient experience has been shaped by dental teams trying to minimize the stress of the dental visit.

And that's a good thing. The rise of the modern dental practice has seen the creation of patient-friendly, welcoming spaces that reject the stereotype of the cold, scary dental office.

"We've all read about it and talked about it and it's a topic that has been covered from every angle. Nobody wants to come to the dentist," said Dr. Jay Stockdale of Renaissance Dental Care in Rancho Cucamonga, California. "I've had hundreds of women tell me they'd rather have a baby than have their teeth worked on. We know that we have to provide the best experience possible if we have any chance of growing our practices and making more people want to come to you."

Like other dentists, Stockdale took steps to make his practice as comfortable as possible, create a pleasant environment with kind team members and, most importantly, do right by the patients clinically. And while the patient experience has changed in recent decades with the attention to dental anxiety, Stockdale felt that it could

be even better.

The source of much of the anxiety is the same as it's always been: the drill and the administering of local anesthetic. "I find that people don't like the drill, but it's really the needle that they're afraid of," Stockdale said. "As far as relating to apprehension and pain, I've had many patients over the years tell me, 'Doc, you have to invent something so I don't have to get the shot.'"

For many patients, that fear was initiated by a bad childhood experience at the dentist. Stockdale said he regularly sees it in aging patients. Some dental practices in the mid-20th century charged one fee for fillings and a separate fee for the local anesthetic, he said. When families couldn't afford both, the procedures still needed to be done. That meant opting out of getting numb, and that meant children being scarred by a traumatic, painful dental experience.

"Part of our goal in reducing the level of

anxiety patients feel is to get young patients off on the right foot," Stockdale said. "Then they won't develop the fear of dentistry and they won't avoid dental care later in life."

Avoiding the drill and the needle

Across the board, dental technology has transformed time and again since the mid-20th century. But Stockdale encountered something entirely new in his latest effort to



reduce patient anxiety while increasing his practice's efficiency: the Solea Laser.

Solea is a CO₂ laser that is fast, precise, virtually noiseless and anesthesia free for most procedures. Better yet, it eliminates the drill and the needle for many procedures. While patients love the experience, dentists love the improved efficiency and practice growth. And with the fact that so many procedures are anesthesia free, multi-quadrant dentistry is possible.

"Solea gives us the opportunity to do more work during the same visit," Stockdale said. "That gives us more flexibility and changes the way that we treatment plan patients. Everybody wins. You can do more in each visit so there are fewer patient visits, and it's more convenient for us."

Solea's unique wavelength enables precision cutting of both hard and soft tissue. Since it is also equipped with a simple user interface, Solea is easy to use for working on everything from gingiva and dentin to enamel and bone. Users simply press harder on the variable-speed foot pedal to cut faster, and softer on the foot pedal to cut slower, giving them total control. It's yet another tool that can be used to help reduce dental anxiety, for generations to come.

"Providing the patients a good experience is old news at this point," Stockdale said. "But Solea does it in a new way. I never thought I would be in dentistry long enough to see something like it."

