

Editorial Department

CONCERNING TRANSFERRED PATIENTS

Far too frequently do unpleasant situations arise when a case under orthodontic treatment is transferred from the care of one operator to the practice of a colleague in another city.

Of the four parties vitally concerned in such a transaction, viz, the original operator, the patient, the parents and the new orthodontist, the first mentioned individual is the only one who seems to receive much satisfaction out of the new arrangement. He suddenly finds himself relieved of all responsibility for the future welfare of his case and this, at a time when problems of treatment are apt to be most intricate and when he has also reaped a great amount of financial benefit in proportion to the services rendered.

The patient, on the other hand, is quite apt to suffer from such a change. Almost invariably there is a lack of uniformity in appliance choice, application and manipulation in the two operators which, at times, makes it necessary for the child to undergo the inconvenience of a removal and replacement of mechanisms. The subsequent treatment may be better or may be worse. Chance plays a hand here.

The parents, being ignorant of the details of treatment, are naturally influenced quite completely by the ideas and views of the orthodontist from whom their child has come. Consequently they are very much agitated and worried when consultation is first made with the new doctor and they find some of *his* deductions differ quite radically from those previously held to be true.

But the operator to whom the case is sent is the individual who is the most unfortunate member of this group. Let us consider some of the reasons for this. Almost always these cases arrive with far too little data for his benefit and help. It does not seem reasonable that any present day orthodontist would begin a course of treatment without accurate models, photographs and radiograms. Yet the writer has had cases referred to him without any of these records. In addition to these elementary details, the new operator has a right to expect, yet seldom receives, a carefully prepared case analysis, which should include a complete history, an opinion as to the etiology, the classification and the prognosis, an outline plan of the treatment and the retention, with a description of the appliances that the first doctor felt were best adopted for carrying out the mechanical phase of these two periods of the work. This would provide a means whereby the

second orthodontist could immediately assume an intelligent relationship to the past treatment and afford him some foundation upon which to build his constructive work in the days to come. Very rarely is he so fortunate as to receive this help.

Another embarrassing problem for the second operator is that pertaining to compensation for his work. Far too often has the first orthodontist received so much of the total fee agreed upon that the amount remaining which, quite naturally, the parents expect will cover the services of the new doctor, is so very little that it hardly pays for the latter's overhead expenses on the case. The error lies in the manner in which the fee payments have been proportioned by the original orthodontist. When this mistake has been made, perhaps quite unintentionally, and the case must be transferred, he should, with all justice, make a proper refund. Far better, however, is an original financial arrangement that always contemplates such a possible change in operators when the schedule of payments is first submitted. Variation in the fee basis, of course, is quite natural in different cities, but it is never so great but that the orthodontist to whom the case is sent can afford to continue the work at the same rate of compensation as the original doctor has received provided the latter has been wise in planning the payments so that there remains the correct proportion of fee for the second operator.

The transferring of orthodontic patients is bound to occur because of the protracted period of the average course of treatment. It can be accomplished in a manner that will be satisfactory to all concerned by simply observing the "golden rule." It should always be given serious and conscientious consideration.