

Learning about aromas

Some of us may be fortunate enough to receive flowers, particularly roses, on Valentine's Day this month. The first thing we do when we receive an arrangement is smell them. Usually, they have been preserved for transportation and much of the natural essences do not release as when they are freshly picked. If you rub a petal of a rose or get close enough to a carnation, you will be able to smell the sweetness that makes our hearts happy. Gardenias and hyacinths are particularly fragrant no matter how they are delivered.

I live near a town in Illinois that has a lilac festival. As a child, I remember riding my bicycle past a hedge of lilac bushes and taking in the aroma of spring. This brings wonderful memories of happy times. Many of us have similar memories of smells throughout our childhood. The classic Christmas and holiday smells of cinnamon and pine can not only bring back beautiful memories but can also initiate physiological and psychological responses in our bodies and minds.

Throughout my travels as a speaker on essential oils, holistic hygiene, and dental spa-related topics, many dental professionals have come up to me and said that they use aromatherapy in their offices. I am often puzzled because it has taken me years to learn what I know as a certified aromatherapist and I have barely made a dent in learning what the Egyptians, Indians, Native Americans, and Asians have been practicing for more than 5,000 years. It is a little like learning a religion. Do you ever really know it all? So when I hear that aromatherapy is used in dental offices or essential oils are used in products — unless it is based on education and training in true aromatherapy — I can only smile or ask if they have a few hours so we can talk.

Aromatherapy sounds so simple but

it is just the opposite. Scented candles that are used in the office and diffusers that put out a scent are only appealing to those who think the particular commercial fragrance smells good. Oatmeal cookie, crème brûlée, and pumpkin spice all sound good and smell good with a whiff of the candle, but are they healthy and acceptable for the general public? Not usually.

Let us begin with the hazards and safety of essential oils. Essential oils should be treated just like medicine. Why? Because they are and have been used as such by sages that are much more experienced than you and me. Western medicine is the newcomer in the form of drugs and pharmaceuticals.

sure that there is no detriment to our patients.

- **Never use essential oils around children, pregnant women, or patients with compromised health histories.** Remember, we are treating the essential oils like medicines and there can be contraindications to many of them. With children, essential oils should be treated as if they are poisons. Citrus oils can be appealing to children and simulate some of their drinks. Keep them out of their reach. Asthma, bronchitis, high blood pressure, and epilepsy can be triggered with the misuse of an oil.

- **Aromatherapy should not be used unknowingly in the dental**

MIND, BODY & SPIRIT

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I believe there is a place for all types of healing and many physicians are slowly coming to accept alternative medicine.

Dental hygienists, however, have always been at the forefront. I suppose it is because we are experts in prevention. We are constantly searching for new and improved ways of treating our patients. Many of us are using alternative medicines ourselves and have an interest in sharing information with our patients. Our patients have our undivided attention for almost an hour; the influence is powerful and effective. We recognize this influence and understand that we are the key educators in the dental office and we take that responsibility seriously. With that knowledge, we want to make

office. OSHA frowns on open flames in the dental office. There are oxygen tanks and many fluids and containers that are highly flammable, including essential oils. Do not use candles. Another reason to not use candles is because many of them contain camphor, which can have an adverse effect on our patients and also on us.

- **Essential oils should not be taken internally.** The most common and effective way to administer essential oils is through the nose or through the skin. Volatile oils can affect the body through the highly sensitive olfactory system. When cells located in the upper part of the nose capture odor molecules, signals go to the brain's limbic region, a primitive portion of the brain. This

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region controls the body's basic survival functions, partly by influencing key hormone-secreting glands affecting the entire body.

As I mentioned earlier, scents can give off physiological and psychological responses in the body and mind. These actions are below the threshold of consciousness. The most important functions necessary to our survival are powerfully affected by smell and we don't know it. Walking past the dentist's operatory and breathing in the rotten smell of decay certainly doesn't take us to a happy place. We don't need to be aware of the smell at all to be affected.

This is true even for odors that bring disharmony and imbalance. For example, when we have a patient come in that is anxiety-ridden and fears us worse than the proctologist, we receive pheromones of fear and we may not even be aware of it. Hence, the anxiety transference. Even though we may enjoy the challenge, we are uneasy and bothered by their expected discomfort.

- **When using essential oils, less is more.** One drop can go a long way. If one drop can treat the patient, two drops will not make it better. Just like the old Brylcreem ads, "a little dab'll do ya."

- **Never use the essential oil without a carrier.** Carriers can come in many forms such as vegetable oil, distilled water, and gels. The essential oils must be diluted; otherwise they can be too powerful and not be as effective or can cause harm.

These warnings are not to deter you from using aromatherapy and essential oils, but they are to enlighten you on the importance of education in this process. Perioromatherapy™ certification is the only dental-specific training on the use of essential oils in the dental office. You can learn more about this by visiting the Web site www.oraspa-rdh.com.

Something new! Each month I will give you a dental-related recipe for healing or treatment of a common problem that may affect our patients or us.

In honor of Valentine's Day (we may do some extra kissing this month), not to mention it is the dead of winter and our lips are dehydrated, I am sharing an essential oils recipe for chapped lips: Two drops of geranium oil and two drops of chamomile oil. Mix well with two teaspoons of aloe vera gel. Apply to the lips when needed. You can use this blend on patients' lips prior to and during dental visits. Alternative oils include eucalyptus, rose, sandalwood, and neroli. Enjoy!

We will be discussing more on the use of essential oils throughout the year.

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