

To bring the matter down to a more direct application, let us suppose that a patient applies to one of you with a tooth that is giving trouble. The patient knows only one thing—that there is pain and it comes from the teeth. It is not to be expected that the average individual will have any intelligent idea as to what is the best thing to be done with the tooth, and the usual request is for its extraction. If you reach for the forceps and extract the tooth the patient leaves the office satisfied, and you may thereby argue that, from the patient's point of view, you have done your whole duty in the matter. But there is another feature of the case. Supposing this was a tooth which, by judicious and skilful treatment, could have been preserved—as most of these teeth are. It is here that the special knowledge you have gained in college places you under an obligation to the patient. You are expected to be familiar with the possibilities of saving teeth, and if you wantonly deprive this individual of a useful organ without first giving him the benefit of your advice as to its possible preservation, you are guilty of a criminal negligence. No matter if it may be easier or more profitable for you to extract, your bounden duty is to acquaint the patient, as fully as you can, upon all the possibilities of the case, as well as upon the seriousness of the loss of a tooth. The loss of a tooth is no trifling matter, as many a patient has learned when too late, and it is a dentist's function to educate the people, in addition to serving them in other ways. Nor should this instruction be merely perfunctory and stereotyped. It will do little good to stand before a patient and make a formal and technical statement of the arguments in favor of saving teeth. You must get down into the soul of your subject and prove to them, by your very earnestness, that you are sincerely interested in their behalf. Most patients will appreciate this, though they may not exhibit appreciation at the time. It is seldom that an earnest appeal of this nature ever fails completely in leaving its impress, and even if you are finally obliged to extract the tooth on account of the persistence of the patient, the fervency of your appeal will be remembered long after the tooth is gone. Then again, cases may come to you where the indications are so strongly opposed to extraction that you are justified in flatly refusing to extract, irrespective of the wishes of the patient—not that you should ever send a patient away from your office suffering with pain without an attempt to relieve it in some way. The dentist's first function is to relieve pain and, no matter how unpromising the patient, whether the veriest beggar on the streets or the lowliest floater in the social scum, the dentist should never hesitate in offering his services for the relief of pain. But the pain once relieved he is fully justified, under certain conditions, in refusing to remove from the mouth of a patient a tooth which he is certain may be made useful for life.