

Suzanne M. Newkirk, RDH, believes that the best aspects of her career as a dental hygienist are the ability to always attain new knowledge and the availability of new information. "I love being a lifelong learner," she said. "I am constantly learning new technologies and modalities for improved patient care."

It was because of this reason that Newkirk decided to start her own perioscopy business, Perioscopy Professionals, in 2009. Perioscopy includes the use of an instrument, a Perioscope, which is a miniaturized fiber-optic camera attached to a tiny probe that is gently placed below the gingival line. The images are displayed on a chairside monitor and magnified up to 48 times, disclosing minute details that previously may have been undetectable.

"Traditional scaling in deep pockets is basically 'scaling blind,' using tactile sensitivity to feel below the gum line for removal of deposits," Newkirk explained. "Even though the root 'feels' clean, there are still harmful bacteria left behind. Perioscopy removes the blindfold to allow visualization of what may have been missed and remove it. Endoscopically cleaned roots become exceptionally clean and allow for the patient's gums and surrounding tissues to become healthier, many times avoiding the need for surgery."

But not everyone was as interested in this new technology as she was.

"When I purchased my endoscope, I assumed that my employer would be as enthusiastic about perioscopy," she said. "I wrote a business and marketing plan which covered every aspect of how perioscopy could be implemented into his practice, stimulate new patient referrals and provide additional income while improving patient outcomes for nonsurgical services. Unfortunately, he was not interested in expanding the scope of his practice to include this technology.

"After being rejected by my employer, I began looking for a 'dental home' for my Perioscope where I could establish myself and build relationships while providing perioscopy services. I interviewed with several general dentists, most of



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whom had never heard of a dental endoscope and had no desire to research the technology or utilize it in their practice. As a result, I decided to change my focus to periodontal specialists and 'go mobile' with Perioscopy Professionals."

As a mobile service, Newkirk, who resides in Mill Creek, Wash., brings her own equipment and materials to the office, needing only an air quick connect to be fully functional. She contracts with different periodontal offices throughout the Seattle area to provide perioscopy services.

Newkirk also continues to work in private practice, in addition to providing nutritional counseling, oral hygiene instruction and a tobacco and smoking cessation program.

A dental hygienist for 29 years, Newkirk received her associate degree in dental hygiene at the University of Alaska, Anchorage in 1981. She said that she decided to pursue dental hygiene after her dentist uncle persuaded her to consider it as a career possibility.

Looking to the future, Newkirk said that she hopes to expand her business.

"I am nearing the end of my career and expect to retire from 'traditional' hygiene in about two years," she said. "During that time, I hope to introduce more clinicians to the benefits of perioscopy."

She also adds, "For hygienists who 'think outside the box,' there has never been a more exciting time to practice dental hygiene than right now."

If you would like more information about perioscopy, email Suzanne M. Newkirk, RDH, at luvsteeth@rocketmail.com.

This edition of Working was prepared by Frances Moffett. ■