

NFCO (Not For Casual Operators) A CAUTIONARY TALE

Note: The tone of the following piece may seem a bit protectionist. My intent is to bring to light a concern expressed by a number of my colleagues about general practitioners mistakenly believing that attendance at a three-hour wet-lab would adequately prepare them to offer complex dental treatments for their patients.

NFCO is a term one of my surgery professors (Al Binnington) used a lot when teaching us young whipper-snappers in the early '80s. It stands for "Not For Casual Operators". He would make this comment before describing to us complex surgical procedures. He was letting us know that the lecture would tell us a bit about the procedure but that there was no way we should attempt the procedure ourselves without a great deal of further surgical training and experience.

At present, there is much interest among many general practices in increasing the level of dental care that they provide and this is wonderful. However, some enthusiastic individuals are seeking to add advanced services (NFCO procedures) well before they are ready to do so. As just one example, we will sometimes get people asking what materials they need to obtain in order to be able to offer vital pulpotomy procedures (as discussed in www.toothvet.ca/PDFfiles/CrownReduction.pdf and www.toothvet.ca/PDFfiles/Pulpotomy.pdf).

Vital pulp therapy is a very delicate and technique-sensitive procedure that requires a deep and thorough understanding of endodontic and dental anatomy and physiology plus an understanding of all of the materials (mineral trioxide aggregate, intermediate restoratives, bonding agents, composite restorations...) as well as a considerable stock of equipment and supplies. If you have to ask what materials you need to order, that is a solid indication that you are nowhere near ready to be offering this NFCO service. It is sort of like the old expression about a Rolls Royce. If you have to ask how much it costs, you can't afford one.

While our southern neighbours do tend to be a bit more litigious, we would be wise to keep an eye on legal trends there. Apparently, in the USA, if a human dentist takes a weekend course on some procedure and then decides to offer that service typically performed by a specialist, they will be held to the same standard as the specialists but a weekend course is not equivalent to years of study and experience.

Root canal therapy, vital pulp therapy, restorative dentistry, orthodontics, maxillary and mandibular fracture repair, periodontal surgery, oral tumor resection and more; all of these subjects are taught in various lectures and wet-labs around the world. Take these courses, by all means, if you are interested. Just be aware that they are all NFCO and a few weekend courses can not adequately prepare you to perform these procedures on live patients.