

Smiling Eyes

Advancing
medical technology—

something to grin about

The piercing buzz of a dentist's drill is enough to make even the most sturdy stalwart cringe. Similarly, the thought of doctors slicing and dicing around your eyeball in a crusade to stop the squint is equally as ominous. However, for a smile you can see and appreciate, many are undaunted. And in the past few years, the breakthroughs in the fields of dentistry and ophthalmology—far beyond contacts and root canals—have been nothing short of extraordinary. The new materials, new research, and new procedures have been a medical marvel, and they are all available now.

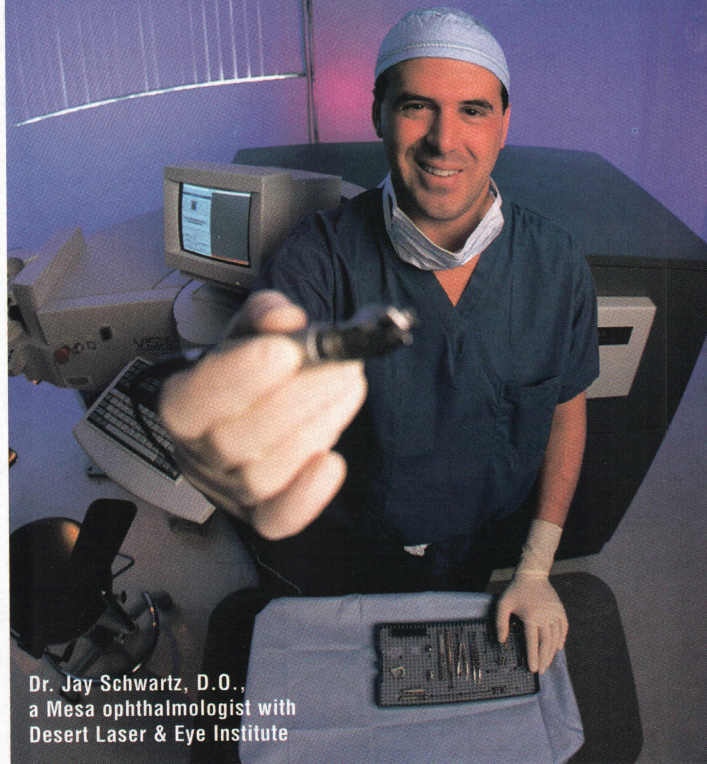
Take, for instance, the laser. According to Dr. George Burbach, D.D.S., dental-specific lasers were approved by the FDA in 1990, but they have come along way since then. "Laser is extremely good at curing filling materials almost instantly, rather than over a period of 30 to 60 seconds [which was done in the past]," he says. "And a filling is much better [and more stable] when cured with the laser."

Thankfully, though, the laser has moved far beyond securing fillings. Burbach says the laser has revolutionized gum surgery, once a traumatizing and damaging procedure using less modern methods. And, he says, using a laser on the gum area cuts down on bleeding and pain. "The laser lets you carve the tissue without much pain because it doesn't go deep into the tissue," he adds.

While some dentists in the Valley have begun drilling cavities with the laser, Burbach is still not a believer in using the laser on hard tissue—better known as the tooth. "There is a drill that will do that, but it's not very cost effective," he says.

As might be expected, root canals and dental implants have come light years in their technology. Both, says Burbach, now have extremely high percentages of success. And, as the technology gets even better in the coming years, he believes the percentages should only grow. But, let's admit it. All this talk about lasers and drilling and gums gives you the heebie jeebies. Technological advances or not, making a dental appointment rates right up there with having your lower lip stretched over your head. But, good oral hygiene is important. You know this. But you're not going to do it unless absolutely necessary. Translated, this means you must be in complete agony.

PHOTO: © Mark R. Zemnick



Dr. Jay Schwartz, D.O.,
a Mesa ophthalmologist with
Desert Laser & Eye Institute

Health Watch

Michael Margolis, D.D.S., P.C.,
runs My Dentist in Mesa

PHOTO: © Mark R. Zemnick

Down For The Count

By Michael M. Druckman, CFS

Big Bad Blue Bone Crusher pounced on The Masked Captain Fantastic, pinning him to the mat. The referee pounded the mat with his right hand: One, Two, Three. Before his hand landed for the third time, Captain Fantastic leapt to his feet and with an airplane spin and a back breaking elevator throw slammed Bone Crusher to the mat and won the match. My grandfather cheered and looked at me with those bright eyes and said, "You see, I told you he would win." "But Pop," I said, "it's all made up; it's phony; they're not really wrestling." "Yes they are," he uttered. I believe he knew that those matches were fake, but he didn't want to admit it.

Now what in the world does this story have to do with investing, you say. We receive the lion's share of our financial information from the media, both print and broadcast, therefore it is important to know the motivations and goals behind this financial reporting.

The attention given to the stock market and other financial assets has exploded in the past fifteen or so years. There is a wealth of information, research and commentary available to the novice and accomplished investor alike. Information, however, is not knowledge. Knowledge is understanding and information without understanding is just noise. I have come to realize that we have been kidding ourselves as to the value of the financial information derived from these sources. Each has their own agenda—to increase readers, listeners or viewers. Their focus is on *today*—to hook their audience to tune in day after day, or subscribe month after month. Their task is to make each day's market activity seem meaningful.

The market doesn't rise—it soars; it doesn't decline—it plummets. Fear and greed are important motivators, and the tendency of investors to act on the here and now has not gone unnoticed by Wall Street. Wall Street has built its empire on a transaction oriented business. Get investors to trade and the commissions roll in.

If emotions are the hook, market forecasting is the Holy Grail. Market forecasting and predicting the future by a myriad of experts from Wall Street brokerage firms is an alliance that works well for both. The media needs experts to give credibility to the views expressed. The media benefits in that the experts pontificate on the swings of the markets, and the

brokerage firms benefit because of the short term orientation of the investment views. More trading, more commissions.

If viewers were to examine the track records of these experts, they would find that as a group, their market calls have been dead wrong. Example: the chief strategist for a prominent brokerage firm, who is a regular commentator for a nightly financial program, has consistently quoted doom and gloom. In 1991, he predicted a major correction with the Dow at 3000. The Dow is now at 9000 and he is still predicting a major market correction.

Accountability and careful recordkeeping of past prognostications would simply ruin the game, so they are ignored.

The next time you watch a business show, notice that the experts must play into the media's hands. "Are you bullish or bearish?" "Where will the market be in six months?" "What's your favorite stock?" In return, the experts get free advertising for themselves and their firms.

Proper disclosure would mandate that the media preface all commentary with the following caption: "The views expressed by this expert may be unfounded in that historically he has been wrong 80 percent of the time, is biased and self-serving and may be at odds with your long-term investment success. Due diligence has not been attempted on any past recommendations."

You don't need daily, weekly or monthly forecasts. They are a poor substitute for a well designed long term strategy and a properly diversified portfolio. With patience and discipline and the right financial advisor, you will realize financial security.

So the next time you see Big Bad Blue Pin Stripe Suit plummeting to the mat, pinning Gray, Camel Hair Blazer and winning the match with a market timing horizontal throw, remember, it's still phony and fake and it's really just entertainment.

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Dr. Burbach understands. Even the American Dental Association understands.

According to the ADA, 40 million people have some kind of fear of the dentist. Burbach, who has been a dentist for 35 years, is keenly aware of this. "Every patient comes in with some degree of active fear, and psychologically I have to deal with that every single day with every single patient," he says.

That's why he is so excited about all of the emerging technologies. They allow him to ask the question: "How do I best handle patients so that I not only don't hurt them in the present, but don't create psychological damage that lasts a lifetime?"

Burbach believes the new technologies will relieve much of the pain associated with dentistry, and, hopefully, relieve

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much of the fear. For instance, he says, the newer composite resins—better known as fillings—many dentists are using now bond to the tooth surface and don't require as much tooth preparation. And dentists are also able to spot dental decay at the microscopic level, which makes it easier and less painful to treat.

"Tooth decay used to be watched until there was a hole big enough to justify the damage done by the drill in preparing the tooth for a filling," he says. "Now we can treat it when there is 15 or 20 percent damage to the tooth instead of 100 percent."

For Dr. Michael Margolis, D.D.S., P.C., a Mesa dentist who specializes in medical problems of the jaw, the proper alignment of your jaw is as critical as the health of your teeth. He has devoted his practice to getting people out of dental and muscular pain through a procedure called Dental Mandibular Joint Treatment.

"A jaw that is lined up properly will get rid of people's headaches and pain," he says. "If you put someone back in a physiological, anatomical, functioning position, you get rid of the pain. That's what I do."

But he points out many dentists do not really understand the severity of the problem or how to treat it. So Margolis, who has testified in court about mandibular joint problems, sees a lot of patients who have been in car accidents or other traumatizing events that have displaced their soft tissues, a malady he calls internal derangement of the jaw. He is able to determine the extent of the damage through X-rays and MRIs. He has even treated a child bitten by a dog, which jammed the neck.

"If you're not repositioned right, when you have trauma like that, it pushes your teeth in anywhere from 1 to 2 millimeters in the socket," he says. "And they never rebound back because ligaments don't go back to their original shape."

The Eyes Have It

Now, you have your oral regime pretty well under control, but you realize you can no longer kid yourself about your eyesight. Your arms are just not long enough to hold that newspaper out in front for a clear read. For some of us, those food menus are just not readable unless a little squinting goes on. And without your glasses, making that morning commute from the bedroom to the bathroom is perilous at best. Take heart. The advances in ophthalmology will amaze you.

Take the newest laser procedure to correct nearsightedness. The FDA has just approved this treatment, which is called Lasik, for 12 diopters of myopia. Diopters? "That means people with real thick glasses don't need them anymore," says Dr. Jay Schwartz, D.O., a Mesa ophthalmologist with Desert Laser & Eye Institute who specializes in the procedure. "People want to be free from glasses and contacts, and this is what people have been waiting for."

The procedure, which costs \$1,695 per eye, is performed by cutting a thin part of the eye and elevating a flap off the front of the cornea. Painless. Really. "Then I use a laser in the middle of the cornea, reshape it, and put the flap back," says Schwartz. "That's the whole procedure. It takes about 15 minutes."

But what makes this treatment so revolutionary is the recovery time, says Schwartz. "With other laser procedures, patients take weeks or months to heal," he

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Thomas D. Pace, O.D., chief of optometry at the Arizona Eye Institute

says. "With Lasik, the recovery time is four hours."

He adds, "The majority of my patients are able to drive themselves to their office appointment the next day without their glasses. I've done surgery on patients in the morning and by their afternoon appointment, they are seeing 20-20 or 20-25 without their glasses."

According to Schwartz, the procedure has been practiced in Canada and Europe for 10 years, but the laser used in the surgery was only approved by the FDA for use in the U.S. two years ago. The procedure itself was approved by the FDA last year.

Schwartz believes once news of this procedure gets out, people are going to be lining up. "Out here, everyone wants to be outside and active, and they don't want to be bothered with their glasses or contacts," he says. "I think as more and more people learn about it, they are going to want to have it done, so I'm expecting this to really take off within the next year or two."

The field of glaucoma has also undergone some advancements, mainly in the area of medications, according to Thomas Pace, O.D., chief of optometry at the Arizona Eye Institute & Aesthetic Laser Center in Sun City. In the past, he says, a drug called Timoptic has been used, but its side effects in some patients sometimes caused the heart to slow down, which affected breathing. Now a new drug is on the market, called Xalatan, has none of those side effects, Pace says.

"The only side effect of Xalatan is that it can make your blue eyes a little brown over the course of a few years," says Pace, "and that's in only 7 percent of the people."

Competitive telecommunications at the

As with many diseases, early detection of glaucoma can help manage some of the problems brought on by the disorder. "It's still a 30-year disease," says Pace, "but the sooner you catch it, the less likely you are to have optic nerve damage."

He says this early detection is being accomplished with advanced instrumentation and better visual field testing. With these things, Pace says doctors can detect optic nerve damage earlier than before, and treat it more effectively.

Because Pace's practice centers around what he calls "geriatric" medicine, he treats many older patients who have macular degeneration, a disorder where the macula in the retina starts to deteriorate. People with this problem, he says, tend to use magnifying glasses to compensate.

But a recent seven-year, nationwide study of this disorder found that antioxidant vitamins have been especially effective in slowing down the progression of the disease. One vitamin in particular, Ocuvite, has showed real promise for macular degeneration, says Pace, and so many eye doctors have begun advising patients to take it.

If you've been thinking about dental work, or perhaps discarding those glasses and contacts, now might be the time to take serious consideration. They have moved beyond the dream stage. Now, you can clearly see, they are a reality. It is, perhaps, a thing worth smiling about.

AB

Cynthia Scanlon is a Tempe free-lance writer.

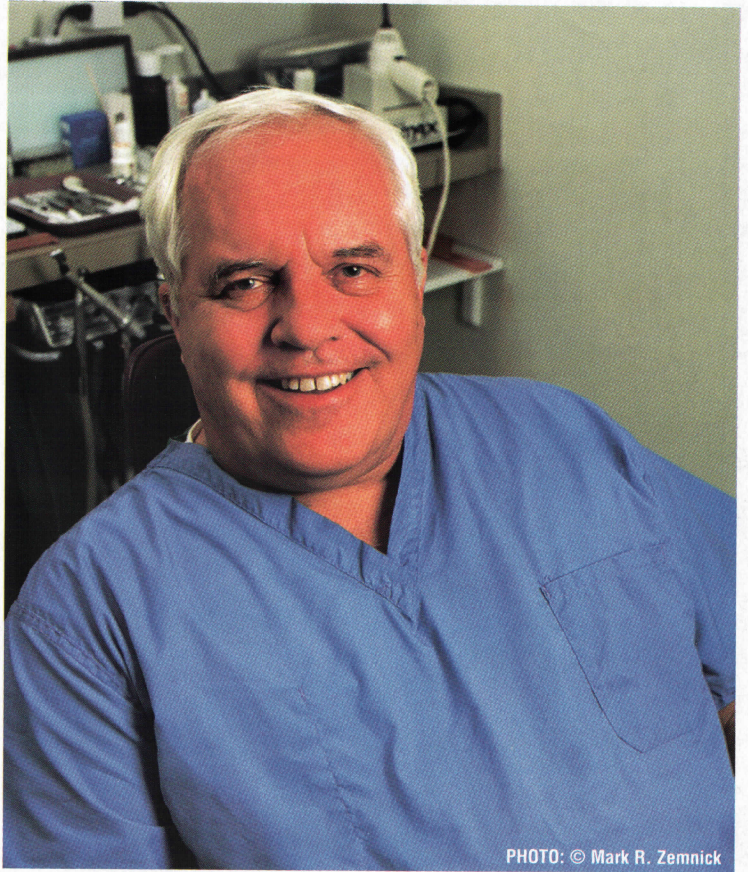


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