



How Dentists Refer Braces Patients to Orthodontists: Survey Results

Most general dentists tend to refer most braces patients to an orthodontist. However, one in four dentists reports that they treat all or most orthodontic cases themselves, according to a recent Wealthy Dentist survey.

San Francisco, CA, November 05, 2007 --(PR.com)-- Some dentists send [braces](#) patients to orthodontists, while others treat them themselves, according to a recent Wealthy Dentist survey. One in four dentists reports that they treat most braces patients themselves. On the other hand, one in three refers out all orthodontic patients.

"It's a win for everyone," said an Illinois dentist who refers out all orthodontics. "Patients are well served, we are looked upon as caring, and orthodontists are geared specifically to do this." A California dentist who refers less than 20% of orthodontic patients said, "I am happy to refer out those cases which I don't feel competent to treat or which I just don't want to treat for whatever reason. Having been actively treating orthodontic cases in my general practice for over twenty years now there are not a lot of cases which I refer out."

The most remarkable differences were related to geographic location. The trend in the data is clear: rural dentists are more likely to treat orthodontic patients themselves. Over half of rural dentists (54%) report treating braces patients themselves, while only 9% of urban dentists and 26% of suburban dentists do. Even today, there's a kernel of truth in the "country doc" stereotype: in rural places, a general dentist may be the only dental practitioner for many miles. "I do orthodontic work in my office and have been for 20 years. I only refer out surgical ortho cases," said a general dentist in rural Wisconsin.

Gender differences were dramatic. Male dentists were more than twice as likely to treat orthodontic patients. Female dentists were more likely than their male colleagues to refer these patients out to a specialist. "I believe that only a good orthodontist can get really good, long-lasting results," said a female dentist. "I don't need to refer for 95% of cases or more," said a male dentist.

The relationship between general dentists and specialists is a complicated one, sometimes dominated by rivalry, other times by cooperation. "I refer all orthodontics to the specialist. The relationship I have with my orthodontist is one of the most valuable in my practice," gushed a Florida dentist who refers out all orthodontics. "I only refer the tough cases and tough patients," said a New Jersey pediatric dentist who refers less than 20% of ortho cases.

Complicated orthodontic cases demand specialists. "Minor tooth movement is within the purview of dentist and pedodontist. Treatment planning for major malocclusions is better done by an orthodontist and an oral surgeon," said a Minnesota oral surgeon.

Some dentists see it as their duty to refer patients out to dental specialists. "I feel the best treatment for my patients is for a specialist to do things for which they are better trained than I am. This goes for orthodontics, oral surgery, periodontics, and endodontic work. Weekend courses do not compare to the rigorous training that specialists receive in their residencies," said a North Carolina dentist who refers



more than 80% of orthodontic cases. "Our profession is awash in undertrained dentists putting their bottom line ahead of their patients' best interest, and I feel this will marginalize our profession in the medical community."

Some general dentists have found that there's good money to be made in doing orthodontic work. "It is my understanding that GP's do 80% of all ortho in the USA," commented a Michigan dentist who refers less than 20% of orthodontic patients. "If we (GP's) as a whole just knew how easy ortho is, the vast majority could increase monthly income by 15 to 25%. I took my classes from USDI, love doing it, and now me and my stay at home wife are both driving Mercedes."

Invisalign braces are changing the role of general dentists in orthodontic treatment. "We offer Invisalign braces in our office, but all wire and brackets are referred to a traditional orthodontist," commented an Oregon dentist. However, a Michigan dentist disagreed with that strategy, saying, "The vast majority of GPs have no formal training so they should refer out. Most of the GPs who do Invisalign have no clue about ortho and are doing a disservice to their patients."

"A lot of general dentists are getting in the braces business," said Jim Du Molin, dental consultant and founder of The Wealthy Dentist. "Certainly, there's good money in orthodontics. But are all of these practitioners fully qualified? For the sake of their patients, let's hope so."

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For additional information on this and other Wealthy Dentist surveys in the areas of dental implants, cosmetic dentistry, sedation dentistry, and dentures, as well as more dentists' comments, visit www.thewealthydentist.com/surveys.htm.

The Wealthy Dentist is a dental marketing and dental practice management resource featuring dental consulting expert Jim Du Molin. The site's weekly dental surveys and newsletters are viewed by thousands of dentists across the United States and Canada. The Wealthy Dentist is a sister company of the Internet Dental Alliance. IDA is the largest provider of internet dental marketing campaigns, dental websites, email newsletters and online find a dentist directories in North America.

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