



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q: *I read your past article about high production orthodontic offices. My son is going to one of those offices, and I noticed the staff has more patient contact than the doctor. Is orthodontics that easy or are the staff as good as the doctors?*

A: Your question suggests that production oriented offices portray orthodontics as so simple that even marginally trained high school level assistants can do it. You pondered how much quality there is when treatment is staff dependent. Fact 1) Quality orthodontic treatment is rarely simple. Fact 2) As production increases, less doctor time is available per patient, and more staff delegation is necessary to move patients through. One hopes that the doctor is more qualified than the staff to do the work. A typical production oriented orthodontist (with 4 or more chairs filled at a time with patients) briefly looks at a patient and directs the assistants to do the treatment, which hopefully is within the state regulations set by the Illinois Dental Practice Act. These orthodontists have 4, 5, or 6 other patients to see in the same 15 minutes. Personalized care orthodontists take about 10-15 minutes per patient to do their own adjustments, so they will get a better feel for the treatment progress. This results in more accurate treatment decisions, and a decrease in treatment time for the patient. Doctor interaction and communication directly with parents can also be accomplished during this time slot. Having an assistant do the work, or "seeing" 16 patients an hour eliminates all of those benefits. The only benefit from high patient volume is high doctor income, and no patient benefit at all. Orthodontics is a dental specialty which requires thoughtful treatment planning, precise bracket placement, and detailed monthly attention by the doctor. As a mother observing what is commonly referred to as a "treatment mill", you were given pause to reflect on who is really treating your son. I hope this answer sheds more light on it for you.

!Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to: **Woodstock Orthodontics, c/o Kirk H. Christensen, DDS, 226 West Judd Street, Woodstock, IL 60098, Phone: 815-337-5522**