

Dr. James Frizzell – Tackling Mental Illness in the Dental Office

Chiraz: Hello and welcome to CDA Oasis. My name is Chiraz Guessaier. Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some point through a family member, friend or colleague. Data tell us that by age 40, about 50 percent of the population will have or have had a mental illness. That is us and our patients. As dentists, it is imperative to be able to spot the signs of mental illness and spot the consequences of these ailments, such as domestic violence and child abuse. Today my guest is Dr James Frizzell, who holds these issues dear to his heart and took it upon himself to undergo training and learn more in order to be able to help his patients. He is here to share his experience with us. Dr. Fizzelle, thank you very much for talking to our audience. A warm welcome to you on CDA Oasis

Dr. Frizzell: Well, thank you very much. It's an honor to be here with you.

Chiraz: I'd like to start by asking you why are these issues important to you and in general, why you should dentist care?

Dr. Frizzell: Well, I took it upon myself to take... Well, the literature came in the mail from St John's ambulance, a local unit here in Niagara Falls and they have CPR courses and they have first aid courses, but it caught my eye that they actually had a mental health first aid course, which I'd never heard of that before. So, I took it's a two day course, six hours Saturday, six hour Sunday, mental health first aid and I learned quite a bit from the teacher and from classmates, a firemen, ambulance driver, a nurse, a police officer and a high school teacher, and we were all able to share our stories. And the mental health first aid, since taking that course, I've put literature in the waiting room of my dental office and some patients have actually come to me, sharing things with them about how their family members had mental health issues and some of them even considering they share with me some of their teenagers committing suicide, what do I do?

Dr. Frizzell: And from taking that course at St John's ambulance, I was able to give them some advice. And then that course tells you to go to the next step. Which I went to Humber College in Toronto and took an ASIST course which stands for Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training. It's the word ASIST but spelled with one "s" and that's a suicide intervention to try to talk somebody out of suicide. And one of the things I've learned, believe it or not, people actually confide in bartenders. Some people go up to a bartender and say, I'm thinking about killing myself. I'm going to commit suicide. And I actually went on a couple of Sundays and visited some of the bars and sports bars in Niagara Falls and gave out literature to the bartenders and explained to them about this happening and some of them even admitted that they've had bartender, clients, customers that have come and shared that they were having suicidal or depression thoughts. So, there's definitely a big issue in society today with mental health issues.

Chiraz: What is the role of the dentist and the team? What you're mentioning right now is so unusual to hear about, that a dentist is so interested in these things and tries to help in such a way. And you mentioned some of the things that you did, visiting the bars and trying to talk to people and raise awareness, but in general, what is the role of the dentist and the dental team in spotting these issues and trying to help?

Dr. Frizzell: Well, people, not only myself but other dentists, they probably have the same experiences. People come to us for their dental needs and they want a dental treatment, but it's surprising how many people, and I don't milk people for information, I don't question them, and sometimes people just want to tell their story and they want somebody that's going to listen and that's where you roll the chair around and face them face-to-face, look them in the eye and be an active listener. They just want to tell their story. If they have a depression issue or a suicide issue or a mental health issue or a family member that has a mental health issue or ADHD or Asperger's syndrome and they're stressed out from that in their life dealing with their children and they just need to tell their story. They want somebody to listen and I'm sure that's not only with other dentists and people respect to have a high respect for dentists. And the other problem that's going on in Ontario is if somebody does want a referral to a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist, the waiting list is over one year. Like you can't get in to see a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist.

Dr. Frizzell: There's a tremendous waiting list. So, they just want somebody to be a listening, compassionate, and most dentists are, and they just want to tell their story and have somebody listen.

Chiraz: In our conversations you also mentioned an interest in domestic violence and child abuse. Can you tell us a little bit, how did that interest start, and have you witnessed any in your office?

Dr. Frizzell: I've had one domestic violence case, about six years ago, where I was called in at 1:00 AM in the morning where the husband punched and knocked out the teeth right out of the socket of his wife. And at 1:00 o'clock in the morning and he confessed to me that he had done that. I was then called to court to testify against him; and that he had confessed to me and that testimony put him in jail and the wife was sent through a relocation program, with a new name to a new community. Child abuse, and I got an interest in that because I'm currently a student with the McGill university program forensic dentistry. But because of that interest, I saw the overlap with domestic violence, child abuse, elderly abuse. And today speaking with you, I was planning to focus-in on the child abuse issue because children definitely need to be protected.

Chiraz: You mentioned something really interesting and important because there is a fine line between doing something right and something wrong, especially when

it comes to domestic violence and child abuse. And there's also a lot of fear out there that, you know, taking a step and being a witness in a court setting is actually, unsettling for a lot of people. But you took that step and you did it. Aren't you afraid? Weren't you afraid?

Dr. Frizzell: You have to take a stand. And this is before the legislation existed with the RCDSO, this is going back five, six years ago and just out of compassion for that woman and the only person that really hated me was the defense lawyer. The defense lawyer hated me. But other than that, it was a good experience.

Chiraz: it's a question on the minds of a lot of people. There is always that fear of getting yourself into something that you don't want to get into in these circumstances. But I commend you for what you did, really, and standing for that is absolutely the right thing to do. Now I'm going to get to the best part of this interview, which is the resources that you're going to share with our audience on these issues. What can dentists do when faced with these issues? The floor is yours.

Dr. Frizzell: For example, the domestic violence issue, when you're dealing with an adult, unless you have that adult's permission, you cannot report it. You have to see if they want, if they give you permission then you can report it, without permission legally cannot report it. Where it's a different ballgame when you're dealing with child abuse. When you're dealing with child abuse, you're legally obligated to report it. I wanted to share some scenario. This is hopefully you can see this picture, with the red arrow. This is a picture from Dr. Roman Holowaty; and this little boy had a bite mark on his forehead and this ruler, in forensics it's called the scale, but it's literally a ruler and the thing is like as a dentist to get involved, you don't have to have a fancy ring flash macro camera, you don't have to have a fancy forensics ruler, you can even just use a ruler like this here, from Staples, just a plastic ruler.

Dr. Frizzell: When you take a photograph documentation is so important, to have everything documented. You could even as a camera, just use your cell phone camera, but it has to be documented and this scenario, which was actually a real event, you have to call the local children's services, but they need to come immediately. That's a very critical factor. And the other thing is that the dentist and the dental assistant in the operatory needs to establish a relationship of trust with the child patient that's suspicious of child abuse and sometimes that means asking the parent to have a seat in the waiting room. But if the parents know that there's child abuse, they're going to be over-protective. They're going to refuse to leave the operatory. Because you need to establish a relationship with the child, you and the dental assistant, a relationship of trust, to be able to question them and to get them to communicate what was the source of those bite marks or it could be cigarette burn marks.

- Dr. Frizzell: It could even be fractured bones. Children with child abuse have fractured bones. So, a whole bunch of issues and some of it is camouflaged by clothing. The course that I'm taking, this book edited and written by Dr. Dorion, hopefully you can see that, and it's a bite mark Evidence. This is the number one book in the world. Dr. Dorion is an authority on many subjects, but also an authority on this subject and showing you this book is just to emphasize how important it is, the bite marks that go on children and even forensically sometimes they can even swab the saliva from the bite mark and use that for the DNA to identify the perpetrator. What I'm suggesting is that the Ontario Dental Association, and they have their little local component societies, where in my case it's NPDA, the Niagara Peninsula Dental Association, they need to start to invite people like Dr Robert Dorio to come as a guest speaker to educate us about child abuse and bitemarks and documentation.
- Chiraz: Dr Frizzell, thank you very much for sharing your experience, sharing these tips and these valuable pieces of advice. I really appreciate you taking the time and speaking with me today.
- Dr. Frizzell: Likewise. Thank you very much.