

Dental and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery: Coming of Age of a Speciality.

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'Heritages of the past are the seeds that bring forth the harvest of the future.' The great Roman Orator Cicero was well aware of this saying when he quoted: 'Not to know what has been transacted in former times is to continue always as a child. If no use is made of the labors of past ages, the world must remain in the infancy of knowledge'.

DENTISTRY – ANCIENT ART, MODERN SCIENCE

After reading this you will be glad you live in the year 2015, the period in which knowledge regarding modern dentistry and oral and maxillofacial surgery exist. Surprisingly, basic oral hygiene, like tooth brushing, was common in India since the prehistoric times. Our ancestors have been using camel hair, charcoal, meswak, neem etc. as agents to clean their oral cavity. With modernization and civilization tooth brushing and flossing were introduced as oral hygiene techniques to the mainstream.

To give you an idea of what dental and oral health was like before brushing and flossing was integral to personal hygiene; let's recollect the practices of dentistry and oral surgery.

Oral disease has been a problem for humans since the beginning of time. Skulls of the Cro-Magnon people, who inhabited the earth 25,000 years ago, show evidence of tooth decay. The earliest recorded reference to oral disease is from a Sumerian text (circa 5,000 B.C.) that describes "tooth worms" as a cause of dental decay.

14TH CENTURY AD

During the Middle Ages, dentists did not yet exist. Instead, professionals performing these extractions were barbers, and not medical professionals. Instead of providing preventative and promotive care, their work was entirely focused on removing any source of infection for the purpose of alleviating pain. They used a forcep-like tool to extract teeth. No anesthesia, no aseptic procedure was used, so we can well assume that this was not the most comfortable process.

17TH CENTURY AD

Dentistry is born mainly due to the credit of physician Pierre Fauchard. The French physician introduced the preventative care concept. He explained how acids from sugar are a source of tooth decay. Fauchard was also behind the developments of the extensive use of dental prosthesis for missing teeth and the introduction of dental fillings as a treatment for dental caries.

18TH CENTURY AD

Dentistry got its recognition, with dentistry now being considered to

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be a discipline in its own right, rather than a lesser form of medicine. A major development was the introduction of dentures, made with various materials gold, silver, or ivory making them very expensive and incredibly uncomfortable.

19TH CENTURY AD ONWARDS

1840 Dentist Horace Wells first demonstrated **nitrous oxide for sedation.**

1840 Dentist Thomas Morton first demonstrated **ether anesthesia for surgery.**

1929 **Penicillin** was invented. This had a major impact on treatment protocols for dental and oro-facial infections.

The forceps used by the dental and oral surgeons were symbols of torture until the introduction of inhalation anesthesia by Horace Wells in 1848. After using the gas very timidly at first, several dentist established themselves as "specialist extractors under gas". In order to secure patients, the specialists appeared at every dental meetings to show their skill and speed. The specialist extractor with the blood bespattered face, gory forceps in hand, and tooth and roots flying in all directions was a common sight at dental workshops and meetings.

The use of pure nitrous oxide anesthesia was of short duration. It worked well when but one or two teeth were to be extracted. The speed that was required to remove several teeth at one sitting before the patient had regained consciousness often resulted in mutilation of the alveolar tissue, and many broken roots were left in the jaws. However, nitrous oxide anesthesia was indeed a great improvement on the methods of the old days when a peg or two of whiskey stupor was the routine method for easing the tortures of extraction.

In 1860, Dr. Edmund Andrews of Chicago introduced a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide. The mixture, the improvements in apparatus, and the ready availability of the gas which was now supplied by the manufacturers, helped to popularize the use of general anesthesia.

The next advance was the introduction of novocaine as a local anesthetic. The awareness of the seriousness of focal dental infection burst upon the profession just about the time that novocaine was introduced. Extraction and surgical removal of teeth spread like an epidemic and dentist along with the so called specialists were busier than ever before.

With local and general anesthesia at their command, the specialists who now had become known as "exodontists" filled a very useful place in the profession. Some of the young graduates, many of whom were also physicians, performed all types of oral surgery, including plastic corrections of the face.

As far as India is concerned, Dr. Rafidin Ahmed is regarded as the **Founder of Dentistry** in India. In 1920, Dr Ahmed founded the first Dental College of India in Kolkatta as well as of Asia, which was financed by starting the New York Soda Fountain in Calcutta. In his memory the Govt. has named the Dental College as Dr. R. Ahmed Dental College and Hospital.