

The Implant Case

(Stewart and Rogers)

Drs. Van Gogh and Rembrandt are general dentists in a partnership practice in an urban area. Dr. Rembrandt established the practice 20 years ago. The practice grew, and after 10 years, Dr. Van Gogh joined as an Associate. Dr. Rembrandt increasingly talks about being bored practicing general dentistry and reports that he feels unfulfilled in spite of his excellent income. To broaden his practice, Dr. Rembrandt decides to take an on-line implant course that is widely advertised to prepare participants to place implants. The six segment course is entirely didactic, and involves no direct patient contact. At the conclusion of the course the participants receive a video tape of the implant placement procedure and a website with access limited to those who have completed the course. In addition, the participants receive a framed certificate announcing their membership in an "implantology society." Dr. Rembrandt also has purchased a digital radiography and photograph unit, which he feels will enhance the marketing of dental implants. This unit costs \$15,000.

Dr. Rembrandt completes the on-line course and receives his certificate. He is enthused about the prospect of adding this service to his practice and eager to try out what he has learned. He instructs Dr. Van Gogh and all of the staff that candidates for bridges or dentures should be referred to him for implant consultation.

Dr. Van Gogh wonders whether she should refer implant candidates to her partner or to another local general dentist, who has completed more than 2 years of didactic and clinical dental implant education and has been placing implants for 10 years. Dr. Van Gogh has referred several implant patients to this other dentist and has observed excellent treatment results. She is also concerned because the staff members (especially Dr. Rembrandt's assistant) have received no training in placement of implants or use of the digital radiography and photography unit and he thinks this could impact the outcomes and quality of the result.

Ms. Monet, one of the dental hygienists, is concerned because she feels she is being coerced to "sell" implants and also doesn't know how to answer patients' questions about the success of implants and Dr. Rembrandt's experience. She, as well as the dental assistants, is having difficulty using the new digital unit and feel the quality of the images is less than what they can produce through conventional means. Mr. Picasso, the front office manager, wants to know how the images are stored as part of the patients chart and how he is suppose to use them for insurance submission since the office printer won't work with the digital unit.