

Aural health

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Coupled with the urge to provide complete patient care by controlling the environment and ambience of the practice comes the inevitable need to add that extra ingredient — music.



Not only are dental practices not immune from noise but they positively add to the aural burden. The problem comes when we try and cover up the 'nasty noises' with 'nice noises'. Rather like with covering up nasty smells, the downside is that it costs more and introduces yet another complication to have to manage, and anyway not everyone likes the fragrance of 'summer glades' as it aggravates their asthma.

But in the same way that 'goals of the month', rides in lifts and motorbike accidents now all happen to music, clearly so too should dentistry. The obvious solution would seem to be piped music but the difficulty is selecting the right 'sounds' as the modern parlance has it.

Then there's the vexed question of when to have it playing? Should it be all the time, in which case it really either has to be so bland that after the initial enthusiasm nobody notices it anymore — somewhat defeating the object of the exercise — or so stirring that by the end of the first morning everyone is emotionally drained?

Definitely to be avoided is the sort of music that harbours surprise bursts of loud crashing and banging. Poised with an air rotor, the last thing you need is an unexpected volley of Led Zeppelin at their meanest. Similarly, a patient busy rinsing round with mouthwash might reasonably be forgiven for unloading their oral cargo to the rupturing effect of an unexpected explosion from Guns and Roses.

Resist too the temptation to telephone your credit card number through to one of those local-radio-advertised offers for ethnic music compilations. A 12 CD set of the whispering miracles of South American pan-pipes for £26.99 plus P&P does not, as the seductive voice suggests, provide you with 387 hours of earth-bound relaxation. Instead you suffer interminable weeks with a seemingly endless repetition of unexpurgated windrush sufficient to drive even a South American

pan-pipe player to the borders of insanity.

Similarly be warned away from anything which promises 'sounds of nature' or analogous resonances. It is bad enough being cooped up in the same room for eight or more hours of the day anyway with hardly a break for a you-know-what, let alone having the continual reminder of the tides of the world's oceans lapping your subconscious and stimulating your own fluid rhythms.

Then again there are new age, low-tech ways of trying to achieve the same thing. Wind chimes for example. Strategically positioned in the entrance hall or the

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reception they jingle and jangle with happy bio-rhythmic harmony each and every time a patient steps in or out of the practice. Fine for the individual 'happening-by' on an occasional basis, but enough over a relatively short period of time to tinkle staff out of their minds.

Speaking of which, also take care when choosing a merry jingle to play over the telephone while putting callers on hold, remembering that this should reflect the correct image of the practice. Uplifting as *Onward christian soldiers* may be, is it really the tune that you want to leave thrumming through patients' minds for the rest of the day? Then again, Roy Orbison, Dolly Parton or Freddy and the Dreamers will say more about you than flock wallpaper in the waiting room ever can.

Despite all your best efforts at a cover

up external noises can still creep in, causing aggravation as much for your inability to control them as their constant or even intermittent intrusiveness. Things to watch out for are those pedestrian crossings that go 'beep, beep, beep, beep, beep' every time the leggy little green man appears. It is certainly worth being suspicious of anyone selling a practice who insists on you coming to view it in the evening or at night time, 'after the shops have closed'. Chances are that the little green man's button is pressed far less often, lulling the potential new tenant into a false sense of security.

Be very suspicious too of any premises viewed during fog and known to be in the vicinity of an airport. A pound to a seventieth of a Euro that the instant you've signed the contract and the sky turns blue every instrument will get vibrated off the bracket table as the landing wheels come down on the 12.30 arrival from Seattle.

Probably the most irksome extraneous noise though is the road drill. It is as if the labourers, or whatever politically correct designation they are termed by nowadays (road surface penetration operative is a fair guess), have a closed-circuit camera trained over your shoulder. No sooner do you open your mouth to speak than a blast of metal striking tarmac sears through the surgery.

Waiting, it seems in vain, for it to stop, the sudden cessation allows everyone a nervous moment to relax before it unpredictably vibrates its way through your skull once again, and again and again. Even this is eventually bearable compared with the unending steam of patients who beam as they walk into the surgery with the opening greeting 'well if I didn't know better I'd swear you were using a road drill in here today.' Reach for select knob, hit the volume button and end it there and then with *Status Quo meets the Ring Cycle*.

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