

WHY AM I STILL IN PAIN?

**Lindsey M. Hamil
Karen McPherson
Medical University of South Carolina**

Joe looked up at the dentist with complete disbelief. “Explain to me why, Dr. Michaels, after FOUR root canals, I’m still in pain?!?!?”

INTRODUCTION

Joe Smith was a relatively healthy and active 32-year-old man who was thankful to have avoided doctors and dentists for most of his life. Unfortunately, it seemed like the trend was starting to come to an end as he was getting less and less able to ignore the constant pain in his upper jaw.

THE APPOINTMENT

After weeks of near constant use of over-the-counter pain relief medicine, Joe finally decided that he couldn’t avoid the dentist any longer. He made an appointment with the well-established and long-time family dentist his parents had visited in their small town, Dr. Michaels.

Dr. Michaels had provided dental care in his community for over 20 years. He listened to Joe’s concerns and told him that he’d need to take some radiographs (x-rays) to appropriately diagnose the source of his pain. He tapped on several teeth and performed some additional tests. While a couple of teeth felt a little bit achy, there was one tooth that nearly sent Joe through the roof when Dr. Michaels touched it. Joe was not surprised to hear that the tooth would need a root canal to resolve his pain.

Based on the sensitivity of the tooth and radiograph imagery, Dr. Michaels explained that the issue was most likely connected to an infection in Tooth #3 and he also noted some inflammation in his upper jaw. He scheduled the procedure for later in the week and gave Joe a prescription for amoxicillin to take in advance to avoid infection. Two days later, Dr. Michaels completed a root canal on tooth #3 and Joe left his practice indicating that he felt better already.

RETURN VISIT

About a month after the root canal procedure, Joe returned complaining that the pain had returned. After taking additional radiographs and performing more tests,

Dr. Michaels said that unfortunately the inflammation in his jaw tissue meant that the neighboring tooth, #2, was also infected and another root canal was necessary. Once again, Joe left with a prescription for amoxicillin and returned a few days later for another root canal on tooth #2.

Six weeks passed and Dr. Michaels was concerned to see Joe back in his operatory. Yet again, Joe told him that the pain in his jaw was so bad he could barely stand it. This time, however, he rubbed the left side of his face and pointed toward teeth #14 and #15 on the opposite side of his face.

Dr. Michaels asked for a new set of x-rays to assess the situation and again found inflammation in the areas Joe had identified. Once again, Dr. Michaels showed Joe the x-rays and told him that two more root canals were needed to address the infections causing his pain. Joe looked defeated but said that he would be willing to go through the procedures again to put a final end to his pain. He left with amoxicillin and a scheduled appointment for the following Monday.

Following the procedure, Joe felt amazing, and his pain was gone. Unfortunately, six weeks later, it started again. He made another appointment with Dr. Michaels and was dumbfounded to hear that he wanted to perform another root canal on tooth #13. Joe looked up at the dentist with complete disbelief.

“Explain to me why, Dr. Michaels, after FOUR root canals, I’m still in pain?!?!?”

Dr. Michaels understood and felt Joe’s frustration – a root canal was an expensive and invasive procedure. He had been thinking about Joe’s question a lot too. With some recent articles surrounding dentistry, he knew provider trust could be destroyed easily and how that could affect his practice. *Why is he still in pain? Am I missing something? He seems to have generally good oral hygiene so what would cause an otherwise healthy man to have these chronic infections? Why IS he still in pain?*