

BUSINESS NEWS

New Treatment Guidelines Validate Work Of Wellington Dentist

Wellington dentist Dr. Steven M. Miller, a member of the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine, knows how effective an oral appliance can be in the treatment of a common sleep disorder known as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). Miller's patients have found much needed relief through this simple treatment option.

Miller recently presented a lecture to the Central Palm Beach County Dental Association on March 3 on "The Dentist's Role in Treating Snoring and Sleep Apnea."

New professional guidelines have provided further support for what both Miller and his patients already know: oral appliances, which are similar in appearance to an orthodontic retainer or a sports mouthguard, are an excellent treatment option for patients with snoring and mild to moderate sleep apnea.

The practice parameters, which were created by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and published in the journal *SLEEP*, were written by an expert task force and were based on an accompanying review of scientific evidence. Although the parameters recommend continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) as the first line of treatment for patients with severe OSA, they state that oral appliances may benefit a percentage of patients with more severe levels of airway obstruction. The task force also concluded that it is appropriate to use oral appliances to treat snoring patients who do not respond to behavioral interventions such as losing weight or changing sleep positions.

"These guidelines support what I have seen first-hand in my experience in dental sleep medicine," Miller said. "A professionally fit-



Dr. Steven Miller during his presentation on dental sleep medicine.

ted oral appliance can be the best treatment option for many people who suffer from sleep-disordered breathing. Oral appliances are less expensive and more convenient than other available treatments, and they have a high rate of success in mild and moderate cases of sleep apnea."

While snoring is common and often thought to be harmless, it can also be a warning sign for OSA, a serious medical condition that affects an estimated 18 million people in the United States. Dangers related to OSA include severe daytime sleepiness, an increased risk of high blood pressure, and higher rates of heart attack and stroke.

"Obstructive sleep apnea occurs when the tongue and soft tissues in the back of the throat collapse and block the airway during sleep, which produces pauses in breathing that prevent air from getting to the lungs," Miller explained. "These pauses can occur a few times or several hundred times per night."

When worn during sleep, an oral appliance maintains an open and unobstructed airway in the throat by repositioning or stabilizing the lower jaw, tongue, soft palate or uvula. There are many types of oral appliances, with some designed only to treat snoring and others for both snoring and sleep apnea therapy.

The new practice parameters recommend that patients with mild to moderate OSA use an oral appliance when they prefer it to CPAP, which is the most effective treatment for sleep apnea. An oral appliance should also be considered by patients who are unable to successfully use CPAP or who fail surgical intervention. Patients with severe cases of OSA may also benefit from an oral appliance when either CPAP or surgery is unsuccessful.

According to Miller, the most common warning signs for OSA are frequent and loud snoring, daytime sleepiness, and waking up during the night with a choking sound or gasping for breath. Often it is the bed partner of a person with OSA who first recognizes these symptoms. Men and women who are obese are also at a higher risk for this sleep disorder. Medical treatment is necessary to prevent OSA from having a detrimental impact on an individual's physical health.

"Anyone who suspects that he or she might have sleep apnea should consult a sleep specialist right away," Miller said. "If testing reveals that sleep apnea is present, then we can work with the sleep specialist to determine which treatment option is best for that person."

To schedule a consultation with
Dr. Steven M. Miller,
call (561)798-8023

For more information, visit
www.stevencmillerdds.snoringisntsexy.com.