

Dental job becomes trans-Atlantic procedure

BY ANNEMARIE FRANCYK
BUSINESS FIRST

Many people would not cross an ocean to see a dentist. But Tas Cornwell did.

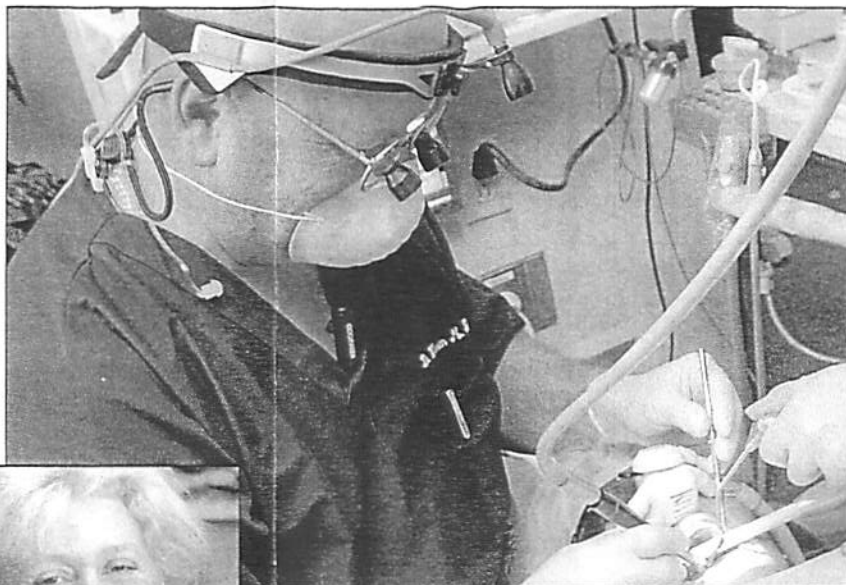
For the English woman with a deep fear of dentists, it was well worth the 17-hour trip last week from her door in Sussex to the West Seneca office of Dr. Warren Krutchick, who practices sedation dentistry.

Krutchick had been studying sedation dentistry for two years, becoming state certified in January. He wanted to offer the service to his cosmetic dentistry patients who usually are in the chair for a long time. But he knew he might grow his practice by attracting those who have an aversion to sitting in a dentist's chair at all.

One in 20 Americans avoid dental care, cancel appointments or are no-shows because of fear, according to the Journal of the American Dental Association.

Known in dental circles as "conscious sedation," or more popularly as "twilight sleep," the practice induces a minimally depressed level of consciousness in patients through valium-type drugs. The patients have none of their usual anxiety and fear but are able to respond appropriately to the dentist's directions. They remember nothing of the visit and the doctor can do the work without having to continually calm the subjects.

Krutchick, who has been practicing since 1976, previously used a combination of nitrous oxide and shots of Novocain for jit-



Tas Cornwell of Sussex, England, made the long trip to West Seneca to receive dental treatment from Dr. Warren Krutchick, who practices sedation dentistry.

tery patients, but that wasn't strong enough for some and played with the fears of patients who didn't like needles. He gets about three requests a week for sedation dentistry. On Oct. 18, Cornwell was one of them.

The 36-year-old mother of two found Krutchick in an Internet search, desperate to be relieved of mouth pain caused by years of neglect and spotty dental care. What finally prompted the hunt, Cornwell said, was a change in health policy in the United Kingdom that allows light sedation only for dental cases. That's not enough for Cornwell, who woke up nine minutes into a root canal during an appointment in June. After being scraped off the ceiling, Cornwell's fear overcame her

and she left the office in the middle of the procedure with a cocktail of antibiotics and pain pills.

In the weeks that followed, she suffered constant pain, an abscess every other week and weight loss because she couldn't chew solid food. Finally, the antibiotics triggered a chronic kidney condition that sent her to the hospital for several days.

Of the four dozen American doctors she e-mailed, Krutchick was one of two who responded. He thought it was a prank, but Cornwell insisted that her problems were real.

"It's mind boggling to me that there is no one in England who can do this," Krutchick said.

Cornwell sent Krutchick her X-rays and a plan was laid out for her care. The English patient is not unlike Americans who put off dentistry: her small problems, left untreated, multiplied into major dental work requiring days, not hours, of dental work. And that is what runs up the bill, Krutchick said. The cost of sedation dentistry ranges from \$2,000 for a half-day's work to \$15,000 for a full day. The charge for sedation itself is \$300 per visit — the rest is the multiple of dental procedures need-

ed to repair the problems, he said.

All day Monday, Krutchick did some basic health history and dental work-ups on Cornwell. The next morning, she was given either a Ativan or Triazolam pill and was fitted with a nasal mask that delivered the nitrous oxide gas. While the patient slept, Krutchick finished that root canal procedure, addressed her gum disease and removed some problem teeth. Every two hours or so, Cornwell was awakened with some orange juice for a stretch and a walk around the office. By the time the juice's sugar rush wore off, the drugs resumed their work and Cornwell was back in the chair. After a day off on Wednesday, Cornwell would be back at the dental office on Thursday for short-term restoration that will hold until next year when she expects to return for permanent work.

Krutchick is offering something more for the patient from across the sea: a week-long stay with his family. His wife Deborah reasoned that Cornwell wouldn't have to worry about navigating on the right side of the road in an unfamiliar country, plus there would be someone to stay with her while the sedation wears off. Additionally, the family promised to take her to Eckl's Beef & Weck Restaurant in Orchard Park at the end of the week, when she finally could bite into something substantial.

The trip represents a couple of firsts for Cornwell, an artist by trade who also operates a pet cemetery and park in her southern England town. It's her first trip the United States and the only time she has looked forward to going to the dentist.

"I literally want it done so I am without pain," she said. "If I can go home with an American smile, all the better."

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