

# Periodontal treatment for anxious patient with complex medical history

An interview with dental hygienist (DH) Heidi Zisterer, Dental Hygiene Award winner

For 6 years now, Guided Biofilm Therapy (GBT) from EMS has been a part of prevention and non-surgical periodontal therapy at the White Line Dentistry practice. Using GBT, practice employee DH Heidi Zisterer was now able to solve a special patient case and win an award for it.

**Ms. Zisterer, this summer you won the Dental Hygiene Practitioner Award. It was conferred in 2024 for the first time by the German Society of Dental Hygienists (DGDH) and the German Society of Periodontology (DG PARO). Your documentation of the particularly challenging care of a periodontitis patient with systemic disease impressed the jury. Why was this patient case a challenge for you?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** The 52-year-old female patient presented to our practice in September 2023 with pain. She last visited her dentist back in 1983, as she had an extreme fear of dental treatment. The biggest challenge was convincing the patient to have the treatment.

**How did you manage to motivate the anxious patient to cooperate?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** She suffered from poor oral health, especially bad breath. And she is a very motivated person by nature. When she came to us, she was already aware that her dentition was going to need a lot of work. Basically, she was cooperative and wanted to change something herself. I told her that we would manage the whole thing together and she would then have a completely different feeling in her mouth. She accepted that she would have to endure the treatment for a better feeling in her mouth, for good esthetics, and for an improved quality of life, even though she was afraid.

**Your patient hadn't been to a dentist for over 40 years. She was surely in need of extensive treatment. What did the treatment plan look like?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** Two teeth, 17 and 18, had to be extracted, carious teeth had to be treated, and non-surgical periodontal therapy was also necessary. She was diagnosed with periodontitis Stage III Grade B.

**In addition to the fear of dental treatment, was there anything particular you noticed in the medical history?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** One challenge was that she has a very allergic reaction to some anesthetics. She suffered a cardiac arrest during surgery seven years ago! The patient also has hypotension. On top of that, she is extremely reluctant to take medication.



DH Heidi Zisterer works in the team at the GBT-certified practice White Line Dentistry in Tuningen (Black Forest, Germany), which was honored in 2023 as Germany's best dental practice team. She herself won the Dental Hygiene Practitioner Award 2024. Pictured here with her happy patient and award. Photo: © Heidi Zisterer



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**To what extent did you have to and were able to take these factors into consideration for the treatment?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** I was particularly concerned that her blood pressure could get out of control if we injected an anesthetic for the periodontal treatment. We therefore had a family practitioner on call. I combined the initial therapy with anti-infective therapy (AIT) and performed this quadrant by quadrant. This was less stressful for the patient and we were able to leave out two local anesthetics that we would have needed for the pretreatments. I also scheduled much more time for the treatments than usual. In addition, I knew from the start that I wouldn't be using any adjuvants for this patient, as she would have rejected them. Therefore, it was clear that the pockets would have to heal without supportive measures and that Guided Biofilm Therapy (GBT), i.e., my treatment, and her oral hygiene would have to be sufficient.

**Your practice performs AIT following the Guided Biofilm Therapy (GBT) protocol from EMS, Switzerland. The systematic procedure follows eight clearly defined steps, from assessment of oral health, disclosing the biofilm, and using Airflow, Perioflow and Piezon, to quality checks and arranging the recall appointment. Does the GBT protocol give you confidence when dealing with challenging patients?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** Definitely! I know that the GBT protocol works with absolute certainty. You don't need to deviate from the procedure. What's more, I'm very experienced in it. Patients also notice that the treatment is always performed in the same way and that I'm calm and confident when doing so. This calm and confidence transfers to the patients.

**Was the treatment goal achieved with your special patient?**

**DH Heidi Zisterer:** The pockets could be reduced in such a way that only a few residual pockets of 4-5 mm probing depth still remained. But we can deal with this in supportive periodontal therapy (SPT). And I was amazed at how much the patient's oral hygiene had improved. The patient now comes to me for SPT every three months. The painless treatment and disclosure in the GBT protocol involve the patient in the treatment process. This results in patients coming gladly and regularly to recalls.



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