"I'll Never Retire"

Part I

Wow, do I hear that statement a lot! Well, yes, we all will retire. It may or may not be on our terms, but assuredly, we will all stop working someday, and none of us will get out of here alive. Prepare.

My father also had no plans to retire from dentistry before he had his heart attack in his office at the age of 72. He lived about two months and finally died from complications from bypass surgery in 1979. Dad loved what he was doing, as do many of us who have difficulty imagining life without dentistry. But passion by itself doesn't make a smooth transition.

Ignoring the inevitable doesn't prevent it from happening. It just removes us from making difficult decisions and leaves our future to chance. Of course, we don't know what will happen in our futures, but we certainly can influence it by decisions and choices we make every day. Accepting our eventual mortality, allows us to work backward from the end. A timetable is impossible, but as Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

So how do we prepare our minds to have the best chance of enjoying a fulfilling retiring process during what could be the best years of our lives?

First, let's understand why some of us say that we'll "never retire." The basis for this statement may be divided into two broad categories, love/pleasure and fear/pain. (The classic "seeking pleasure", and "avoiding Pain".) On the love/pleasure side, we may find that: 1) We love what we're doing, 2) We cherish the close social network of patients, colleagues, and staff, 3) We feel a sense of purpose. 4) We feel comfortable with the current stable situation.
On the fear/pain side, we may fear:
1) Lack of something else to do. 2) Uncomfortable home life. 3) Finances. 4) It's the beginning of the end. 5) Loss of identity/ego. 6) Change/the unknown.

When any or all of these "reasons" are not addressed, retirement is left more to chance than choice. The earlier these issues are addressed, the more transition into retirement is determined by choice, not chance. (More in our next article.)

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