Clinical Dental Consultation Case Scenarios with the Theme

“Breaking Bad News”

Scenario 1:

This patient, Mr John Cowan is 55 years, married, have a daughter. He works as a tube driver in London. He has attended for treatment after being referred from the local GDP (General Dental Practitioner). You have carried out a full mouth inspection and discovered advanced periodontal disease.

Three teeth (the Upper Right 5 and 6, as well as the Lower Left 6) have 10mm pocketing and are Grade 3 mobile. All the remaining teeth have between 4mm and 8mm pocketing and three are Grade 1 mobile.

The patient has no current medical conditions and is not taking any medications. The patient smokes approximately 10 cigarettes a day, and drinks socially.

In your opinion the three most severely affected teeth should be extracted and replaced with prostheses. The long-term prognosis for the remaining teeth, without extensive periodontal therapy, is questionable.

**Conversation Starts:**

Dentist: Good morning, Patient.

Patient: Good morning

Dentist: How are you feeling today?

Patient: Not bad

Dentist: I understand you've been experiencing some issues with your teeth, particularly on the right side.

Patient: Yea! I've been having trouble with my teeth feeling loose, especially on the right side. It's been quite worrying, to be honest. Can't you just use some special glue or something to fix them in place?

Dentist: I wish it were that simple, Patient. Unfortunately, the looseness of your teeth is due to advanced periodontal disease. Do you know what it is?

Patient: No

Dentist: Basically, it happens when the gums and bones attached around your teeth start regressing or in other words decrease in size. This results in your teeth losing support and getting loose or mobile.

(Note: The students shall avoid using jargon and explain them for the patient to understand)

Patient: Oh! So what are you going to do to fix them?

Dentist: It requires more comprehensive treatment. Three of your back teeth, specifically the Upper Right 5 and 6, as well as the Lower Left 6, are severely affected and may need to be extracted.

Patient: Extracted? But I wasn't expecting that at all! Are you sure they can't be fixed in some other way? I really don't want to have any gaps in my teeth,

Dentist: I understand your concerns, Patient. Losing teeth can indeed be distressing, but in this case, the severity of the disease means that extraction may be the best course of action to prevent further complications. We can discuss options for replacing these teeth with prostheses to fill the gaps, maintain your appearance and oral function.

Patient: Umm! the idea of dentures is quite unsettling to me. I see... But I'm worried about how it'll affect my appearance. Won't I end up looking much older without these teeth?

Dentist: It's understandable to be concerned about your appearance, but we'll work together to find a solution that preserves both your oral health and your confidence. With modern prosthetic options, we can minimize any changes to your appearance and ensure you have a natural-looking smile without you looking older.

Patient: But…Why it happened? I mean… I brush my teeth twice daily so what has just happened?

Dentist: One of the main reasons for people getting this disease is smoking. And you mentioned smoking approximately 10 cigarettes a day. Have you considered cutting down on smoking? I mean it’s better to think about it for future prognosis of your teeth.

Patient: Well! I did not know that smoking could be that bad for your teeth. I mean, umm! I shall cut down on smoking ideally.

Dentist: That’s great. I can refer you to smoking cessation services to help you with this. Also make sure that you continue brushing your teeth regularly twice daily. Is there anything you not clear and want to ask me today?

Patient: No! I mean... It's just a lot to take in. I didn't expect all of this when I came in today.

Dentist: I completely understand, Patient. It's important to address these issues now to prevent further complications down the line. We'll work closely with you to develop a treatment plan that meets your needs and concerns every step of the way.

Patient: Thank you for explaining everything, even though it's not what I wanted to hear. I appreciate your honesty.

Dentist: You're welcome, Patient. We're here to support you throughout your treatment journey. Let's work together to improve your oral health and overall well-being.