

DR. SUSAN MAPLES

DDS, MSBA

Age

56

Practice

Susan Maples DDS, Holt, Michigan

Specialty

General dentistry





MENTOR

“The whole dental team can improve America’s declining health if we just do a few things differently.”

A FEW YEARS AGO, Dr. Susan Maples’s appointment book was filled with young patients home from college for winter break. It should have felt like a reunion with “my kids,” as Dr. Maples calls them. But she made a grim discovery: 16 of the 17 students had gotten a cavity since their last cleaning. “I sat down and cried,” says Dr. Maples.

That day marked a turning point. “Over nearly 30 years of practice, I’ve seen a sad down-slide in the health of our patients,” she says. Determined to rectify the problem, she wrote and published a book last September: *BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life*. She tours the country nearly every weekend to promote the book to dentists and offer advice on how to identify signs of other diseases when examining a patient’s mouth.

“Dental team members — the whole team — can truly make a significant dent in America’s declining health with the relationships we already have,” Dr. Maples says, “if we just do some things differently.”

In her own practice, that means having her younger patients rinse with a solution that highlights plaque in blue; her charges then choose one of 30 tools to combat plaque. Dr. Maples coaches them on technique and tracks their progress over time.

Never one to miss a teachable moment, Dr. Maples also asks every patient under 18 to do a science experiment during their visit. In an old X-ray developing room she converted into a “children’s hands-on learning lab,” kids do age-appropriate experiments: youngsters taste peanut butter to learn the difference between natural and artificial sugars; teens are tasked with thinking like a detective to match a saliva sample to a patient’s medical record.

It’s educational and fun — and, Dr. Maples notes, it has had one major, unintended and positive consequence on her patients: “They all want to grow up to be dentists,” she says. With a mentor like her, is that any surprise? ■