

Using Technology to Motivate Referrers

Endodontics is an inherently competitive field. In addition to facing competition from other endodontic practices, there are consistent challenges from general practitioners, who often believe they can provide comparable services. Every endodontist should be aware of their competition—and seek out opportunities that enable them to truly differentiate themselves.

Located in Houston, the largest city in Texas and the fourth largest city in the nation, Southwest Endodontics may be even more aware of the discipline's competitive nature than most. The metropolitan area is home to more than 80 endodontic practices, each of which is vying for a limited number of referrals from general practitioners.



Referrals: An Essential Component of Practice Growth

Dr. Ron Hill, co-owner and partner of Southwest Endodontics, has long recognized the need for effective growth strategies, working with a consultant and tracking key performance indicators, such as the number of one-visit versus two-visit procedures, number of retreatments and referrer/referral patterns. Even with this focus on growth and emphasis on patient-centered care and overall excellence, the practice still experienced slower times throughout the year.

Dr. Hill's wife, Stacy, who has considerable experience in sales and marketing, convinced him to let her take an active role in marketing the practice. In just one day of visiting general practitioner offices, Ms. Hill was able to secure a new referring practice, one that to this day is a top-10 referrer for Southwest Endodontics. It immediately became clear that the path to practice growth would involve a greater emphasis

on building a broader referral base. This approach allowed for more rapid growth, and Dr. Hill was able to add another full-time endodontist (now a partner) and a part-time doctor as well. In addition, a satellite practice was opened in 2015. Around this same time, Dr. Hill first discovered Sonendo® and their GentleWave® System, and he immediately recognized its potential.



Ron Hill, DDS, MSD, and Stacy Hill

Enter the GentleWave® System from Sonendo®

From the outset, Dr. Hill was excited about the system's ability to deliver maximum cleaning and disinfection^{1,2} with far less instrumentation^{1,2} than he had been using. The mechanism of action begins with a process called *SoundFlow™*, in which fluids are degassed, and their concentration is adjusted to the optimal level in the GentleWave Console. The fluids are then circulated through the root canal system and are refreshed constantly throughout the process. In the next stage, called *SoundBAR™*, useful cavitation and

vortical flow are induced for maximum debridement and dissolution. The result is a minimally invasive¹ procedure that thoroughly cleans with significantly less instrumentation.^{1,2}

It was the concept of minimal instrumentation^{1,2} that served as a tipping point for Dr. Hill and led him to consider integration of the GentleWave System into his practice. Dr. Hill and his partner were initially reluctant to make an additional capital investment in a GentleWave System—the practice already employed two full-time endodontists and one part-time endodontist, had invested in two CBCT machines and had just opened a satellite office. Even so, he was able to estimate that less instrumentation would reduce expenditures on rotary files by as much as 75-80% each month, and those savings could be reinvested into a GentleWave System. Subsequently, by demonstrating better outcomes for patients,³ this would be an important step in the future growth of the practice. In addition, this technology was something that referring dentists were not familiar with, and were not already using, so it would be a novel technology that would pique their interests.

Dr. Hill was able to estimate that less instrumentation would reduce expenditures on rotary files by as much as 75-80% each month, and those savings could be reinvested into a GentleWave® System.

Southwest Endodontics' 90-Day Plan to Increase Referrals

On August 4, 2018, Southwest Endodontics initiated a 90-day plan, with the help of Sonendo, to get the word out about the benefits of the GentleWave Procedure. The goal was to ensure a sufficiently fast return on investment to support the cost of the system. Dr. and Ms. Hill began with a letter to 50 of their referring practices announcing their new technology. Dr. Hill and his partner then took three months to familiarize themselves with the GentleWave Procedure's technique and accumulate enough case studies to present at a dinner referral event.

During this time, Stacy Hill began implementing Sonendo's GentleWave Practice Success (GPS) Program and the Advertising Rule of 7, which is: it takes seven interactions with a product, logo or marketing concept before it truly makes an impression. She worked to ensure that the

GentleWave Procedure's logo was prominently displayed on the website, referral cards and post-op reports—she even went so far as to attach GentleWave Procedure-branded business cards to boxes of cookies that were distributed to practices throughout the region. Sonendo facilitated these efforts by providing many of the assets needed to reinforce the connection between Southwest Endodontics and the GentleWave Procedure.

From the very beginning, Dr. Hill was effusive about the results he was seeing with the GentleWave Procedure, citing its effectiveness in removing biofilm, smear layer and infected tissue² from even the most complex root canal anatomies, including accessory canals.^{1,2} Dr. Hill believed that when referring general practitioners were presented with evidence of the GentleWave Procedure's efficacy, they would recognize that those results were something they simply could not presently achieve.

Event invitation for Southwest Endodontics' first referral dinner, provided as part of Sonendo's GPS Program.

On the evening of their first referral dinner in November of 2018, Stacy Hill situated herself at the back of the room and did what many successful salespeople do in such situations—she eavesdropped. What she heard was

extremely heartening. The general practitioners were expressing tremendous excitement for the GentleWave Procedure's ability to provide a level of cleaning^{1,2} that standard root canal treatments could not offer.⁴ The dentists were clearly impressed, but their intent to refer was yet to be determined.

The GentleWave Procedure's Impressive Results Lead to Impressive Results for Southwest Endodontics

While Dr. and Ms. Hill were confident that the referral dinner would lead to some extra referrals, they did not foresee just how enthusiastic the dentists' reaction would be. Within days of their presentation, Southwest Endodontics began to see an uptick in their referrals. Not only that, but they were surprised to see so many of them were coming from practices that had already been A and B referrers. Dr. and Ms. Hill attribute this to the fact that dentists were now able to offer patients more concrete reasons why they were being referred to Southwest Endodontics—most notably that the GentleWave Procedure offered results that other practitioners in the area were not able to match.

Setting the GentleWave Procedure apart from standard root canal treatments elevates the procedure beyond the level of a commodity, and it ensures follow-through on the part of the patient, making redirection—in which the patient opts instead for a familiar name or a friend's recommendation—less likely. Practices that had previously been considered potential referrers (C and D referrers) also began sending patients to Southwest Endodontics.

The numbers reinforce any anecdotal evidence that the Hills offer. Taking all referrers into account—A, B, C and D—and comparing the same time frame (January–May) 2018 versus 2019, the average number of patients referred each month leapt from 1.25 per month, per dentist, to 2.375 following the GentleWave Procedure presentation. With 28 dentists in attendance that evening, the end result is as many as 292 potential new patients per year.

Not only did the monthly average per dentist nearly double, but Ms. Hill was able to track the upticks related to individual practices. Practices that had been referring



two to four patients each year were suddenly referring two patients per month. One practice that had been referring eight patients a year referred 16 patients in one month alone.

Immediate and Sustained Growth

Following the success of the November dinner, Southwest Endodontics held a similar event in March of 2019. Of the 32 attendees, six were A and B referrers and 26 were C and D referrers, and the response to this event has been similarly impressive. Not only are Dr. and Ms. Hill pleased to be achieving a swift return on their investment in the GentleWave System, but they are also proud to be accomplishing it all the right way—by providing patients with better outcomes.

Dr. Ron Hill received his dental degree from the University of Texas-Houston School of Dentistry in 1997 and practiced General Dentistry in the Greater Houston area for nine years before returning to pursue his training in endodontics. He received his Certificate in Endodontics and a Master of Science in Dentistry from the University of Texas-Houston School of Dentistry. He is in full time private practice and is an owner/partner at Southwest Endodontics and Lake Jackson Endodontics.

Stacy Hill received her bachelor's in marketing from St. Bonaventure University in Olean, NY in 1993 and had 25 years' experience in sales with DHL, Oracle and AstraZeneca before joining Southwest Endodontics as their Marketing Manager in 2014.

Get Results with the GentleWave® System

Your practice can experience purposeful and profitable growth with the GentleWave® Practice Success (GPS) Program. Sonendo® will partner with your practice to deliver procedure optimization, patient engagement and increased referrals—all of which can accelerate your practice's growth. Visit sonendo.com/gps-program for more information.



26061 Merit Circle, Suite 102 | Laguna Hills, CA 92653
sonendo.com | 844.SONENDO (766.3636) | info@sonendo.com

¹ Molina B et al. (2015) J Endod. 41:1701-5

² Vandrangi P et al. (2015) Oral Health 72-86

³ Sigurdsson A et al. (2016) J Endod. 42:1040-48

⁴ Paqué F et al. (2010) J Endod. 36:703-7