



DENTAL TOURISM

A PERSPECTIVE FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

Guest Editorial

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"No Son Mexicanos." That would be my input to the current discussion about *"dental tourism"* in Mexico.

I think my perspective may be a little different than most that has been written up to this point on this subject. My reason for writing this is that I want to say thank you to all of those wonderful people I met while in Dental School in Guadalajara, Mexico 1974-1977.

You see, half of my dental school education was in Mexico and half in the United States of America. In 1977 I was privileged to become the first American who started Dental School in Mexico to transfer directly into a class at a prestigious Ivy League dental school.

Now 30 years later it seems that I have come, "back to the future" when it comes to dental tourism and the questions surrounding the qualifications of these practices. There is now much discussion about dentists in Mexico providing care for U. S. citizens.

I am sure this discussion will continue, as it should, for many years to come. My input as someone trained in both countries is to be sure that everyone concerned understands what it means when I say, *"No son Mexicanos."*

What I mean by this is that as I lived in Mexico, I was educated about how Native Mexicans feel about border towns. They say "no son Mexicanos." "They are not Mexicans." This is not; I repeat this is not a negative statement. It only recognizes what Mexicans throughout the rest of the wonderful country that is Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (the United Mexican States) say about border towns. They recognize that border towns are exactly that, *"border towns."* Border towns have a culture and problems unique to being a place where the poverty of Mexico sits within view of the prosperity of the U.S.

There are many people who flock to Mexican border towns for one good reason. These folks are willing to go there because a good living can be made on American tourist money.

Mexican dentists/entrepreneurs are just as smart. There is money to be made by living for a while in a town that normally might have a handful of dentists to treat the, *"natives."* There is one Mexican town near the Arizona/California border that needs about 3 dentists for its usually tiny population. The lure of American money has attracted 250 other dentists.

Remember that border towns, especially Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez have many social problems just like any other larger border town.

It would not do justice to those very competent Mexican colleagues of mine who go to their offices in their hometowns to compare them to dental tourism providers. Just like I do, they treat families and friends and are an important part of their communities. They represent the front line of oral health care just like we do here in the U.S.

Before our fellow Americans decide to use services provided in the new Mexican industry called dental tourism in border towns, please do not equate it with the rest of Mexico. Remember *"no son Mexicanos."* They are not like the rest of Mexico.

Dr. Oro is in private practice with his wife Debra in Oro Valley, AZ. He is a community activist, children's advocate and business leader. He is also a weekly columnist for the Arizona Daily Star newspaper. Dr. Oro is a SADS alternate Delegate to the AzDA.

