

Q & A with... *Dr. Herbert Hughes*



Herbert Hughes, DDS

Dr. Herbert Hughes is a third generation dentist specializing in orthodontics. For the past 30 years he has been in private practice in Alexandria, Va. Dr. Hughes attended VCU School of Dentistry and graduated from Boston University specializing in orthodontics. He is currently the president of the Northern Virginia Orthodontic Study Club (NVOC) and is the president-elect of the Virginia Association of Orthodontics (VAO).

Ignorance can be a powerful driving force. Especially when it's the ignorance of your potential patient base and it's threatening your very profession. Dr. Herbert Hughes has spent the last 32 years in orthodontics learning more and more about his patients, including what they do and do not know about the orthodontic specialty – and what he's learned in recent years has been somewhat alarming.

Adult patients, specifically, don't always seek the advice of an orthodontist about what could be done for their smile. With so much direct to consumer advertising, they may assume a DIY company promising amazing results for anyone by using clear aligners sent through the mail will produce the smile they want, in the timeline they need, with little to no long-term oral health issues, for example.

This new way of reaching consumers with smile treatment options available is causing some orthodontists to re-think their practice model, especially when considering adult patients. Recently, we sat down with Dr. Hughes to talk about the changing needs of the orthodontic patient, his views on esthetic trends, and how his own practice is evolving to meet the needs of his community.

Q: Dr. Hughes, you recently expanded your practice to include what you now call the Adult Smile Center. What led you to make this decision?

A: We noticed that many of our parents were accompanying their children to their orthodontic appointments with either braces or aligners and they weren't being treated by us! Their comments were "I thought you only treated children" or "I thought you only did braces." We knew that in order to be a player in today's competitive market we needed to not only educate our potential patients, but also offer them an experience that is memorable and sharable. This is the reason why we created the Adult Smile Center, a relaxing spa-like environment where adults are treated like adults. We have a completely separate reception room with gourmet beverages and soft background music along with aromatic scents. We have two large semi-private treatment bays which allow for patient comfort as well as room to relax.

Q: What philosophies guide your approach to working with today's esthetic-minded orthodontic patient?

A: I have several core orthodontic beliefs. First, become a great orthodontic problem solver. Don't sell the tools that you use, sell the problems you solve; however, use the best tools to treat your problems. Second, implement evidence-based orthodontics. This has been ingrained in me since my residency at Boston University. Third, deliver excellent results in the least amount of time and at the right time. Lastly, if you don't give patients what they want they will never be truly happy.

The challenge is to give them what they want and need. As a seasoned orthodontist, it only takes a quick look at a patient's records to determine what they need, but in order to understand what they want you have to ask probing questions and then actively listen to their responses. I recently had a 50-year-old female who shared with me that she didn't need a Hollywood smile, she wanted

a Facebook Smile! What she was telling me was that she wasn't demanding perfection, however, she wanted a smile that she could proudly display with her friends and family.

Today's adult patients want short-term treatment with esthetic options. So that's what we offer them. The patients want clear options while the orthodontists want the best clear appliances to deliver superior results in a timely manner, so we use 3M™ Clarity™ ADVANCED Ceramic Brackets and 3M™ Clarity™ Aligners to accomplish both.

Q: DIY companies are aggressively marketing their clear aligners directly to the consumers claiming significantly less treatment times, drastically reduced costs, and even no need for office visits! Is this a viable treatment option and how is it affecting your practice?

A: As a member of the AAO Council on Communications, I can assure our fellow orthodontists that the AAO is aggressively educating the general public on the differences between an orthodontic specialist and a general dentist or DIY company. The good news is that this situation has allowed us to have a conversation with potential patients on the importance of seeking treatment with an AAO orthodontist. It is the orthodontic specialist's education, skills and experiences that allow them to offer customized treatment plans and deliver excellent results. At the end of the day, patients want their orthodontic problems solved and don't really care as much about what tools are used as long as it gets the job done. Another philosophy that I have, as I mentioned earlier, is to not sell the tools that you use, sell the problems that you solve; however, use the best tools to solve your problems. This is the reason why I like so many of 3M's orthodontic products. I believe they have the best tools to solve my orthodontic problems.

I'm not as concerned about DIY companies taking a big bite out of my practice as I am about protecting the public from potentially harmful treatments. The majority of DIY orthodontic patients are millennials who have embraced technology. Understanding this, the COC has partnered with BuzzFeed to produce a YouTube video called "Leave it to the professionals." It is humorous but gets our point across effectively.

Q: You mentioned offering clear choices to your patients. How do you determine which clear option is the best one to solve their problem?

A: Great question! An orthodontic specialist has the knowledge and experience to understand the complexities of tooth movements and as a result, can recommend the best appliances for their patients. Rotated teeth are corrected more effectively with fixed appliances (brackets) while anterior open bites magically close with the use of removable clear aligners to intrude the posterior teeth. Sometimes, I have found it best to use a combination of Clarity ADVANCED Ceramic Brackets followed by Clarity Aligners. I love the flash-free feature on the Clarity ADVANCED brackets but more importantly, the ease of removing the brackets on the patient's de-bond date is a game changer!

Q: So, what's new and exciting in orthodontics?

A: For more than a decade there has only been one clear aligner game in town. That is, until now! It is refreshing to know that we now have choices. 3M is introducing a clear aligner under its Clarity brand. I've been privileged to be a part of the first-time users and I'm really enthusiastic about the results that I'm seeing in my patients so far. The aligners look and feel as good as anything I've seen, and my staff loves their attachment template much better than what they're used to using.

Best of all, getting another option from a trusted company in orthodontics is something orthodontists have been wanting for quite some time. I want to partner with a company that has a full range of superior products and services to support me so that I can deliver excellent results to my patients in the shortest amount of time. I'm confident that Clarity Aligners will be a force to be reckoned with.

Q: What book is on your nightstand?

A: Donald Miller's *Building a StoryBrand*. Game changer on how we market and build our brand. Take home message is that you are not the hero in your patient's story. The patient is the hero and your role is to be a guide to help your patient achieve what they want to achieve. This book is a must read!

For more information about 3M™ Clarity™ Aligners:

▶▶ [3M.com/ClarityAligners](https://www.3M.com/ClarityAligners)