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if you just smile

So when Pete Carroll's USC Trojans used to come out of the tunnel to 90,000 fans at the historic Los Angeles Coliseum on a Saturday night with Eminem's "Lose Yourself" blasting away, the hairs on my arms would stand straight up, my heart rate would double, I'd have a serious case of butterflies...and sometimes I'd even shed a tear. And I'm probably gonna be ten times more excited with ten times the butterflies when I stand and deliver a 7-8 minute presentation to about 2,000 DDS-types and their teams at the Aria Resort in Las Vegas.

About six months ago, I submitted some clinical results to Align Technology, Inc. for consideration as the top restorative Invisalign case in North America for 2014-2015. I thought the clinical results were impressive...but I knew the human results were inspiring. Selection would be based on the final tabulations of online voting from a select committee of clinicians. I knew it was a long shot, but why not take the shot?

Each and every time my team and I engage a patient we have the opportunity to make a difference. We can help people enjoy better health and a higher standard of life. Sometimes we can even help transform a life; this turned out being one of those times.

First part of May, I received notice that my patient, Jessica, and I had made it into the semi-finals, being selected as one of the top 53 cases. On June 1st, I opened an email congratulating me on accomplishing the best restorative Invisalign case in North America. And...I was also invited to participate in an event called the Shoot-out, to be held at the Aria Resort in Las Vegas during the biennial Invisalign Summit. The winners of all four treatment categories present their cases in the Shoot-out; the overall winner is determined by audience vote.

Jessica, a trained vocalist, had held a corporate job, assisting another of my patients who happened to be a Disney H/R vice president. Jessica was congenitally missing two upper front teeth. In my presentation, I describe her as having been the "smartest, cutest, nicest little ole Jack-o-lantern you've ever seen."

And again, the clinical results were amazing...but the story was inspiring. I describe my own team as my family away from home; I love them. And my team has a certain genius that, frankly, I haven't seen anywhere else. They can authentically make others feel welcome, liked, and safe...on "Hello." Eminem's "Lose Yourself" was all about taking a shot, seeing an opportunity. With the environment my team creates, opportunity is plainly there just for the asking.

The note I received from Jessica a couple of months after completing care read "Thanks for everything Dr. V, I'm walking around and I just can't stop smiling. By the way, I left Disney. By the way, I just signed a 6-month contract to be a torch singer, singing blues and jazz...at the Grand Hyatt...in Hong Kong.

Jessica paid us a visit a few weeks ago during a brief trip here before returning to Hong Kong. She consented to sharing about her experience on video and then asked if she could just do one more little thing. In our reception area with no back-up singers or musicians in sight, Jessica belted out "Smile."

"You'll find that life is still worthwhile. If you just smile."

But who ever said a smile can't bring a tear once in a while?

The initial sensation of the metal entering my body wasn't pleasant, per se, but, surprisingly, it didn't hurt either.

After inserting the needles, Dr. Lin placed a heat lamp over my back and let the needles do their work for 15 minutes. He then removed the first round of quills, told me to flip over and began a second round of insertions—this time to my face.

I'll admit, there is something inherently disconcerting about seeing two needles poking out of the top of your upper lip. That said, I didn't feel any pain. In fact, I was exceedingly relaxed.

He continued placing needles along my neck, hands, legs and feet. After 15 minutes and some more heat lamp later, my treatment was finished. My back pain was all but gone.

To keep my gallbladder meridian healthy, Dr. Lin advised me to drink hot rose tea and to

"Meridians are like the 210. If there's a traffic jam in Arcadia, you can't get to Pasadena. You were supposed to be in Pasadena one hour ago. But Pasadena isn't the problem. You need to clear the traffic jam."

avoid cold liquids whenever possible. Bananas and papayas were good to snack on in the afternoon, as they would aid my stress levels. He concluded our meeting by giving me a three-day supply of herbal supplements to take with every meal.

So is acupuncture a magic cure for stress and back pain? In the long term I can't say for sure, but I certainly left Dr. Lin's office feeling great.

What I do know is that in our increasingly multi-tasking, techno-centric lives, the idea of lying down and focusing on nothing but the sensations in your body for an hour is a fascinating luxury. I can assure you: when you have a dozen needles sticking out of your face and hands, stillness is paramount. You will not even think about reaching for your phone. That alone is worth the price of admission. ☺

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