Sleep Apnea, Dentistry and What We Don't Know

By
Arthur M. Strauss, DDS

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Does this title get your attention? Let's see how all this is connected. First of all, what do we know that …?

- We know that we know
- We know that we don't know

What don't we know that …?

- We don't know that we know
- We don't know that we don't know

What we know and don't know depends on your individual background and perceptions. "We don't know" statement, likely leaves us feeling somewhat edgy or annoyed. That feeling is of our body sensations of adrenaline in our bloodstream. This is referred to as stress or the stress response. People have this going on all the time, but do you know that?

We know what we know about our bodies but there is a whole lot we don't know. We trust the scientific community and medical system to know. Is it upsetting to think of the medical research, education and practice as being unscientific by not paying attention to very important aspects of our overall health?

In humans the tongue can fully or partially block the airway. Most people understand CPR, and how the first thing you do is make sure the airway is open. In CPR, we know we have to tilt the head back, clear the throat of anything stuck in it, then pull the jaw and attached tongue forward out of the throat so air can flow freely.

Is this not the problem we have when we're asleep and the tongue and jaws relax blocking airflow, referred to as "obstructive sleep apnea" (OSA)?

But, how does the airway stay open when we are awake? This subject warrants top priority for study in scientific research and application by both medical and dental professionals. But it isn't – not really.

We don't really know all the things our body does to make sure the airway stays open when we're awake or asleep.

The body goes through a whole host of changes to assure we have airflow. We are generally unaware of these behind the scene compensations our bodies make to ensure our airflow, thus survival. Basic scientific literature confirms that these compensations strongly influence the body beginning with the stress response, which impacts body, mind and spirit. Compensations then impact head and body posture and our musculoskeletal system, including our jaws and temporomandibular joints (TMJ).

This is obviously an anatomical problem of the jaw, tongue and throat warranting multidisciplinary research to see what the human body does to manage our airway, when awake and when asleep.