

DOCTOR *of* DENTISTRY

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR DENTISTS

Lisa Marie Samaha, DDS, FAGD, PC

Newport News Dentist With a Passion for
the Art of Dentistry — and Art Itself!



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By Alex Strauss

It would be hard to find a dentist who has been more successful at merging art and dentistry, both in her practice and in her life, than Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha of Port Warwick Dental Arts in Newport News, VA. An avid watercolor artist who has been in private dental practice since 1982, Dr. Samaha has earned a national reputation as both a passionate and compassionate practitioner of the very finest in dental arts — and a gifted fine artist. Using leading-edge technology and her artistic flare,

she routinely transforms lives through cosmetic and reconstructive procedures and restores health with her innovative periodontal protocol. She is now sharing that protocol with other general dentists and periodontists through her series of PerioPassion!® Seminars and DVDs that have put her, once again, in the national spotlight. Doctor of Dentistry caught up with this extraordinary dentist for this month's cover story.



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Dr. Samaha staying at the forefront of periodontal laser technology in her patient care.

Dr. Steven Geller, Periodontist, Massachusetts

"My two days at the perio passion seminar created the most profound dental educational experience that I have had in years ... and I do mean years.

... truly inspirational, and I mean everything about her. And she is attracting a really special group of highly dedicated individuals ... I hope I can live up to, or even come close to the incredibly high standards of commitment to excellence that are so clearly evident in literally every aspect of what she does and who she is.

If I were given the charge of having to re-write the definition of the word 'passion' in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, all I would need to write would be simply: 'see Lisa Samaha.'"

Seminar attendees listening attentively and soaking up Dr. Samaha's passion.



Dr. Samaha enthusiastically sharing her extensive knowledge of periodontal treatment during her appropriately named PerioPassion!® Seminar.



Doctor of Dentistry: How did you first become interested in the field of dentistry?

Dr. Samaha: I believe this was something I was truly born to do. My father was a periodontist, so I was introduced to the profession as a little child. Some of my earliest memories include me sitting on the floor in my dad's private office and pulling his periodontal journals

off the shelf, pretending to read them. I was just so fascinated with the photographs. Fascinated, but at the same time, a little scared of them!

My interest just continued to grow and throughout childhood, I chose dental topics as the focus of my science projects. There is no question that I am truly doing exactly what I am supposed to be doing. I feel so blessed that I realized my life's calling at a young age. My



Dr. Samaha engages in extensive clinical and educational efforts with both her patients and her staff, resulting in patient wellness outcomes and high referral rates. In 2007, she founded the Perio Arts Institute™, which has two divisions: PerioArts Research and the AGD Pace approved PerioPassion!® Seminar Series.

passion for dentistry has grown powerfully over the years. Caring for patients and discovering new ways to help them excites me every day. In recent years, I have been able to help in a broader way through my seminars and research. Dentistry has allowed me to have a great impact on many lives, and for that I am truly grateful.

DOD: You are unique as a general dentist in that you have long been involved in both periodontics and oral surgery. Why have you chosen to concentrate in these areas that are not typically part of most general dental practices?

Dr. S.: I love dental surgery in any form and began with a variety of advanced surgical courses during my senior year of dental school. Assisting my dad, I found surgery to be fairly artistic in nature. Those who know me know I don't do anything in a small way. If I am going to learn a skill, I am going to learn it deeply and well. I started as my father's surgical assistant at age 15, so I have been in the practice of periodontal treatment in some way since 1971. With this clinical background blended with an inherent love of the arts, it made perfect sense that I would want to perform nearly all of my own surgical cases over the years, ranging from basic surgical procedures to more complex periodontal and cosmetic procedures.

Although I am a general dentist, I also have been an associate member of the American Academy of Periodontology since 1984. I receive the academy's online communications, monthly journals (the modern-day versions of the same Journal of Periodontology my dad had on his shelves!) and attend our annual conferences, which provide me with regular opportunities to learn from our profession's top periodontists and closely follow the latest in periodontal research.

While known in our region for expertise in cosmetic dentistry, it seems that we are now well established for our treatment of periodontal disease.

Dr. Chris Bowman, Private Practice, North Carolina

"Add me to the list of excited and eager dental professionals who are 100% energized by Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha and her PerioPassion!® Seminar! She is an absolute wealth of information and passion...and has flat-out figured out periodontal disease.

"I consider our perio department to be very strong, and I've always been an advocate of proactive periodontal care...but I was still blown away by the sheer volume and depth of information she presented. All I have to say that if I were to find out that I have perio, I'd want her to be my treating dentist...period."

That combined reputation has the practice thriving. Nearly 100% of new patients come to me with some level of periodontal disease and most of them tell me they have it before I ever examine them. As a result of the public's increased awareness, patients are coming to our practice with the desire to become their healthiest, no matter what it takes. They truly value and cherish what we have to offer: a commitment not only to beautiful smiles, but to improving total, systemic health by improving their dental health. Minimal time is necessary to convince them of the need for the customized, comprehensive treatment regimen we recommend for them. The monetary reward is beyond my expectations, but more importantly, the professional satisfaction of completing complex treatment plans is at an all-time high for my exceptional team and me.

DOD: What sets your approach to dental care, including your surgical approach, apart from your colleagues?

Dr. S.: Completing complex disease and reconstructive cases in a very short period of time is our niche, for sure. This comprehensive approach draws a significant number of new patients with very advanced levels of disease. My comparatively small, fee-for-service practice devotes an entire day of personalized care for one patient, each week. Our patient may be in the chair for five, or as many as 10 hours. My entire team and I are there to support them and keep them pampered and comfortable. On that day, I might extract hopeless teeth, perform bone grafting, soft-tissue grafting, biopsies, implant placements, tori reductions, alveoplasties, flap and osseous surgeries, laser therapy, other forms of traditional periodontal surgery and root canal therapy,



Before



Catie's veneers by previous dentist



After



Catie's crown lengthening and veneers by Dr. Samaha

if needed. With strategic planning, performing our patient's full-arch or even full-mouth reconstruction is sometimes accomplished at that visit, as well. Otherwise, we begin with the reconstruction phase at a subsequent visit, a few weeks later. Regardless, the opportunity to take a patient full circle, from the most serious level of oral disease to freedom from that disease in one day, is totally amazing and, for me, the most personally gratifying aspect to practicing dentistry. And to allow them to experience a beautiful, albeit temporary, new smile the same day is quite emotional. Quickly thereafter, we watch the transformation in our patient's systemic health, not only through their subjective experience, but also through the results of medical blood testing. This is absolutely the best feeling ever — not just for me, but for everyone involved.

Patients really appreciate the eradication of a lifetime of oral disease in one appointment and completion of their reconstruction shortly thereafter. What I used to see in one year, in terms of the volume of patients needing complex or extensive surgery and reconstruction, I now see in a week because of the reputation the practice has in taking on complex cases and turning them around quickly. Practicing this level of care is truly my love.

I have learned over the years the only way such extensive treatment is done so smoothly and effectively is by careful, meticulous planning and communication with each of my patients, with my highly skilled in-office team and my intimate network of nationally recognized dental lab technicians who are willing to go above and beyond to “make it

happen” in a short time. An investment in hundreds of hours of advanced education each year also is also a part of the equation for practicing in this manner, especially as new technology and new techniques are constantly on the horizon for helping to make the process its most predictable. And it's all worth it.

What may be surprising to most, is that we do not use sedation. Here is where I need to take a moment to explain why we are able to do so much, on many highly phobic patients, without sedation. As an artist, I consider the design of my office to be my greatest work of art. In 2003, after my first 21 years in practice, I built from the ground up, and our patients (and we!) enjoy our beautiful meditation garden, complete with the tranquil waters of our koi pond as the focal point of the entire office. Soothing music, professional massage, spa-like amenities and healthy nourishment are also part of our patient's experience during their complex appointments. It seems that because the physical atmosphere is calming, the team is well-trained in relaxation techniques and the patient is clearly focused on the vision of BEST health, our patients are able to work through even complex care without sedation. I can't help but think that our patients heal more rapidly and typically uneventfully, in part because when they are fully awake, we must be exceedingly gentle in our surgical and our relational approach. And I love that! We have taken time beforehand to really listen to them and address their concerns and desires so that we can move forward in an atmosphere of complete trust. And as we know, that positive mindset goes a long way toward positive physical healing.

Dr. Samaha notes that their patients “truly value and cherish what we have to offer — a commitment not only to beautiful smiles, but to their total systemic health ... Our protocol for treating periodontal disease allows us to not only help patients enjoy more beautiful smiles, but help them live longer, healthier lives.”

DOD: Who is your typical patient?

Dr. S.: Close to 80% of my patients are people who require advanced cosmetic and/or periodontal care. Many patients who come to us have been to so many other dentists who had never presented them with comprehensive care options. They accept care from us because we engage them in the diagnosis of their disease and then, with their goal in mind, we develop a clear plan for their optimum dental health, now and in the future. We don't patch them together. These patients already have a complex dental history. They are so tired of the breakage and the repairs and the loss of teeth. They are really relieved to finally find a practice which not only listens to their concerns, but has the ability to develop and execute a comprehensive plan to the fulfillment of a beautiful, strong and healthy smile. And this brings me to what I refer to as the “cosmetic/periodontal interface.” We cannot, we should not, build those beautiful smiles on bloody foundations. Yet, as a profession, I think we have generally grown frustrated and weary of treating periodontal disease, an insidious disease that seems to require an extraordinary level of care and attention simultaneously by patient and practitioner. Yet, now, because of the magnitude of research in the oral/systemic arena, we have a more important responsibility to diagnose and treat our patients periodontal disease than ever before. And certainly,





“Critical to the artistic image of Port Warwick Dental Arts was the design of the building and grounds.” Dr Samaha considers it her most challenging, but satisfying “work of art”.

patients are growing in their awareness of the need for healthy gums to support their great-looking smiles and maintain their total-body wellness. Regardless of the challenging economy or the cost of their treatment, we have a 95% complex-case acceptance rate.

An avid and award-winning watercolor artist who has been in private dental practice since 1982, Dr. Samaha has earned a national reputation as both a passionate and compassionate practitioner of the very finest in dental arts — and a gifted fine artist. The Upper Gallery, Dr. Samaha’s studio art gallery makes up almost 1200 sq ft above her office. It also becomes her teaching studio.



PHOTO © MONICA SIGMON PHOTOGRAPHY

I believe that one key to successfully practicing this approach to dentistry, is to build strong relationships with our patients. We take a significant amount of time at the front end, building relationships and letting our patients know we care, not only about their dental health, but about their total health. We communicate with their other health care professionals, often providing physicians information with which to diagnose underlying systemic disease. Through medical blood testing provided in our office, up to 70% of our periodontal patients have been diagnosed with systemic diseases and/or deficiencies.

The other key to our success is the ability to begin and complete our patients cases within a very short period of meeting them. Many times, we have turned around a complex case within one to two weeks. This would never happen in an insurance-driven practice. So, in every way, being fee-for-service has allowed us the freedom to be able to accommodate our patients at the moment they are most “ready” to engage, when they first muster the courage to step through our doors.

Patients also appreciate the investment we have made in leading-edge technology. Although we had digital radiography, CEREC technology and an intraoral camera for many years, we built the new office in 2003, with the ongoing commitment to continue updating our technology from year to year. Just in the past few years, we have added two new soft-tissue lasers, new imaging software and new dental software with more technology on its way.

DOD: Creating beautiful smiles is obviously important to you. But you also have a keen interest in the overall health and well-being of your patients. How is this philosophy reflected in your practice?

Dr. S.: Several years ago, we were one of the first practices nationwide designated as an official Center for Dental Medicine. As a practice, we had already made a serious commitment toward bridging the gap between dentistry and the rest of medicine. We decided to join with other practices of like-mind, hoping that we could find the best manner of achieving our goals. Communications with patients’ physicians are critical to our commitment. We dentists know that oral health is intimately connected to overall health. My colleagues within Centers for Dental Medicine, as well as my own seminar attendees, make it a point to converse about this connection every chance we get. Progressively, physicians are learning to appreciate the strength of this relationship. It is critical that we are forthcoming in sharing information with our



Each treatment room gives patients a relaxing view of the koi pond and garden. Dr Samaha's senior dental assistant, Maria, says "Patients often fall asleep within minutes of sitting in the dental chair, and we don't use any sedation!"

medical colleagues. As would be expected, our practice's contact with physicians has given us a reputation which allows for a tremendous source of new patients, not only in their patient referrals, but in them. Medical professionals are now the largest segment of our patient population. Over the years, my reputation as a reliable resource in the oral/systemic connection has become established within the local medical community. I am called upon to provide continuing medical education for our regional clinics and hospitals, further establishing the value of our dental practice in the community. I love to help other dentists become known as the experts in their communities, and do so in my seminars and through the ongoing coaching of my seminar attendees.



PHOTO © MONICA SIGMON PHOTOGRAPHY

DOD: You have established a leading-edge protocol for treating periodontal disease that is receiving national attention. What led to your decision to share your periodontal protocol with other practitioners through your establishment of the Perio Arts Institute™ and your PerioPassion!® Seminar and DVDs?

Dr. S.: In early 2007, I fulfilled a lifetime goal of founding the Perio Arts Institute™ (PAI) here in Newport News. For over two decades, I had been searching for reliable and predictable methods to diagnose and treat periodontal disease that would offer the most stable outcome for my patients. I have been using targeted nutritional supplementation and laser therapy for many years. In 2004, I began tracking research on the periodontal patients within my practice: DNA testing for periodontal disease and systemic blood testing for cardiovascular and diabetic risk. In 2006 we began tracking cholesterol levels and in 2008, Vitamin D deficiencies. I knew that what I was learning through my clinical practice and my research was significant and had to be shared. When we applied certain methods of diagnosis and treatment, patients' periodontal disease resolved faster, they needed less periodontal surgery and had a much lower risk of relapsing. I soon began performing 90% less traditional periodontal surgery because of our protocol. Now, I am able to reserve traditional surgery for only my most advanced periodontal cases. Nearly all other periodontal cases are successfully treated using the PAI protocol, which is a multifaceted approach, developed and taught in its entirety at the PerioPassion!® Seminars and in the PerioPassion!® DVD series. With results like we were achieving, it seemed the institute was necessary so we could effectively share the protocol we had developed and continue the development of supporting research. Over \$500,000 has been invested in the development of PAI, financed entirely by me, so as to avoid any perception of bias. This venture has been my gift, my labor of love, for my patients and our profession.

PAI has two distinct divisions: PerioPassion! Seminars® and Perio Arts Research®. As Director of PAI, I am privileged to have an astute team consisting of a director of research, a research assistant with a master's in nursing, a physician assistant as our course administrator and a board-certified emergency physician as our medical consultant.



Floor to ceiling windows in all four treatment rooms allow patients to relax while gazing upon the tranquil waters of the 4,000 gallon Koi pond and the beautiful meditation garden.

The seminars are AGD/PACE approved for 16 hours of continuing education and are presented at PAI four times a year and at select meeting sites throughout the country, with time permitting.

My dad, Dr. Frank Samaha, a dynamic, skilled and passionate clinician and professor, passed away in 2008. He was also a Diplomate of the American Academy of Periodontology. In honor of his memory, PAI reflects his true inspiration in the world of periodontics. I was very fortunate that he was able to attend the kickoff of my PerioPassion![®] Seminar in the fall of 2007. And as you can imagine, it truly was a highlight for him, as well.

DOD: What are the bedrock principles of the protocols you teach in the PerioPassion![®] Seminars?

Dr. S.: This seminar brings all the latest issues and advances in periodontal treatment together, beginning with a scientific synopsis of the most important research in oral/systemic disease. Consistently updated, the curriculum teaches a multifaceted approach to periodontal disease treatment, which incorporates the use of targeted anti-inflammatory nutritional supplements, the use of soft-tissue laser therapy, the appropriate use of bacterial and human DNA testing, as well as blood testing. We teach dental professionals the procedures to screen for systemic disease using FDA-approved, in-office finger-nick blood tests. In this way, dental professionals are able to assist physicians and patients in the discovery of yet-undiagnosed systemic disease, primarily diabetes and cardiovascular disease, the major causes of death and disability in this country. In our practice, we have helped physicians diagnose 41% of our female periodontal patients and 22% of our male periodontal patients as prediabetic or diabetic, including some with extremely dangerous blood sugar levels. On average, 3-5% of dental patients are undiagnosed diabetics and 20% are undiagnosed prediabetics. We dentists have a tremendous role in the screening of our patients for diabetes, resulting in the improvement of health and even the saving of lives along the way, as periodontal disease can increase mortality rates by a factor of seven or more in later years.

By treating periodontal patients with our multifaceted approach, we have also helped discover and decrease extraordinarily high blood levels of hs-CRP, an inflammatory marker which is considered the

most predictive indicator of future heart attack and stroke. In fact, 72-75% of our periodontal patients present with hs-CRP levels in the high-risk category and up to 18% of them have levels in the high, high-risk category, above 10 mg/L. We have shown how we are able to decrease hs-CRP levels with our protocol. In one especially noteworthy case, we were able to reduce the hs-CRP blood level from a life-threatening high of 44.65 mg/L to a healthy level of 0.65 mg/L within 10 days of treating an acute periodontal infection. (Three mg/L is considered high risk for future heart attack and stroke and 1 mg/L or less is considered low risk.)

Consistently, clinicians come away from PerioPassion! Seminars[®] with new skills, new insights, new enthusiasm for doctors and the entire team, they also leave with a cookbook system of advanced periodontal care and an extensive collection of supporting materials that can be immediately

implemented to improve patient care and significantly expand practice revenues.

DOD: Who attends these seminars and when and where are they offered?

Dr. S.: We share this exciting protocol with general dentists, periodontists and their teams, demonstrating how to effectively and quickly implement the PAI protocol. From the overwhelmingly positive feedback we have had, they are doing it quite successfully. I offer three months of unlimited coaching to my seminar attendees, so we do stay close-at-hand as their new program is being successfully launched.

We now have PerioPassion![®] alumni from most states in the nation and Canada, and have also received many inquiries from overseas. To support this growing demand, we have produced the entire PerioPassion![®] Seminar in DVD format.

The live course is usually offered on a Friday and Saturday. The registration fee includes the doctor and three team members, as we highly encourage team involvement. During the weekend, the multifaceted, step-by-step process for achieving success is presented, to ensure that every graduate is completely confident returning to their practices and

Dr. Neal Smith, Private Practice, Michigan

"My team of 4 hygienists, my associate doctor and I have studied under Lisa at her PerioPassion![®] Seminar and it has really powered up our perio program! What she is teaching incorporates anything and everything that other speakers are offering, plus more.

Lisa is totally current on research, while putting together a science-based protocol that I have not heard or read of anywhere else. Her protocol is truly unique, as is Lisa as a speaker. Because my associate doctor, my hygienists and I have seen results - truly amazing results - by following her system, I know it is not just idealistic theory. It not only predictably works, it offers a stability in periodontal health that I have not seen in my 25 years in practice.

During this economic downturn patients want health over cosmetics. Lisa's perio protocol is a win-win program for patients and the practice."

PHOTO BY JOHN MATNEY



Port Warwick Dental Arts signature Koi pond illuminated in the evening hours

immediately implementing the protocol. Additionally, we also teach a complete and creative method for reaching out to the medical community, partnering for our patient's best health and growing our practices at the same time. We also offer examples of highly successful marketing plans. And we guarantee course satisfaction and success of our protocol 100% of the time.

DOD: Creating beautiful smiles isn't the only outlet for your creativity. You are an award-winning watercolorist, as well. How did that come into your life?

Dr. S.: As a little girl, I always loved to draw and create with my hands. It wasn't until 1991 when my youngest child started school that I took my first real art class. I was absolutely higher than heaven the first time I picked up a paintbrush and I knew from that day that I would never stop painting.

People talk about the diversity of my art, which is located throughout the two floors of my office, and how it looks like the work of many artists. But they also comment that no matter what direction I take in my art, they always know it's mine. Like any artist, there is a common thread in my art, a "soul" if you will, that is evident in my choices of color, texture, line and subject, no matter the diversity. In many ways, it reflects the consistency and the diversity available in the exciting world of general dentistry. I have learned I have to continue to grow professionally, as well as creatively. For me, diversity helps to encourage that growth in the most meaningful way.

I have been limited in time available to paint over the past couple of years because of the development of PAI and my seminars. While I continue to use my creative side in the development of PerioPassion!® seminars, I look forward to getting away at least once or twice a year — just to paint.

DOD: You not only create art yourself, but you also support the arts in your community. How and why do you do that?

Dr. S.: I am a great believer in the life-enhancing power of art in its many forms. Our practice, Port Warwick Dental Arts, sponsors a series of free summer evening concerts, which are held weekly in our beautiful Port Warwick community of Newport News. We also contribute artwork and gift certificates for dental care (often up to \$2,500) for a number of silent auctions, supporting every kind of fundraiser imaginable — Operation Smile, American Cancer Society, hospital fundraisers, breast cancer initiatives, The Diabetes Foundation, the American Heart Association, local museums, church organizations and others. My studio/

gallery, which is located on the second floor of my office, is known formally as the Upper Gallery. It has come to be known affectionately as the "Donation Gallery."

Not surprisingly, contributing to all of these venues has been a tremendous source of quality new patients for our practice, where people of like mind appreciate people who support the arts and charities.

DOD: What does the future hold for you?

Dr. S.: My team and I are excited about the growth we are seeing in the area of implants and we are continuing to forge ahead, further developing our expertise in this area. My team is an exceptional group of quality stars who realize and support the mission and vision not only of our practice, but of our institute.

With regard to PAI, our goal is to have my PerioPassion!® Seminar DVDs translated into several languages so that they can be distributed worldwide. That is going to be a very big project with work begun toward the end of 2009. In the research arena, we will continue to move forward into more areas of DNA testing and in-office blood screening, which also directly contribute to our expanding PAI research initiatives.

Another exciting set of future events has to do with the growing national attention and interest in sharing the knowledge, expertise and innovation surrounding periodontics. Also, we continue to receive national attention for our innovation in periodontics. In 2008, I was chosen as one of 12 dentists — and the only general dentist — to be interviewed for a 12-month series of television spots, titled "The Mouth/Body Connection," broadcast on CNN, FOX TV, NBC and PBS, and internationally on "Voice of America." Featured in the segment entitled "Leading-Edge Periodontal Protocol," I am thrilled to represent the newly developing standard-of-care in the world of periodontal medicine. For dentistry, this represents the first time the world of broadcast journalism has developed a formal series to inform the public on the significant impact of periodontal disease on the human body.

And on the artistic front, I have recognized that because I have become so busy, I have to consciously set aside the time away from home and office to paint. So, I will continue to make plans to attend an art workshop away from home, at least two weeks a year. I am continually looking to learn new things and push myself above and beyond in all areas of my life! And the artistic side is truly pure fun!

I think it is clear to those of us in the world of dentistry that we can positively impact the total health of every patient. As a result, we have a moral and ethical responsibility to help each of our patients live longer, healthier lives. This is the essence of my true passion and purpose. ■



For more information on Dr. Samaha's practice, PerioPassion!® Seminars or artwork, call 1-800-997-9820 or visit her websites: www.PWDentalArts.com (practice) www.PerioArtsInstitute.com (seminar site) or www.UpperGalleryatPW.com (art site).