

Hector's story

Dr. Mark Reynolds tells about the many people involved in bringing this novel case to its happy conclusion

The first time I heard anything about Hector was from my dentist who knew both his family and him. She had referred them to our chapter of Smile for a Lifetime and suggested that he apply. When his application arrived, I was somewhat prepared, but shocked to see both the complexity of his case and his passion and heart.

Hector has agenesis, the absence of permanent teeth, and is missing 10 teeth. When a primary tooth would fall out, there was nothing to replace it. This left him with many gaps, oddly shaped teeth, and holes where teeth were absent. And while he was definitely self-conscious about his smile, he didn't act like a victim or have any less passion for life.

"When the dentist told my mom the first time that I had agenesis, it was in my presence. I felt so sad that I cried all the way back home. I was 7 years old and did not understand why that was happening to me. I prayed for months asking God to let my teeth grow," said Hector on his application.

Although Hector definitely had significant need, our board initially declined his application due to the complexity of his case. We knew we could put braces on him, but he needed so much more to make his smile. We used the next quarter to investigate resources and to determine what we could provide to him beyond the braces.

After meeting Hector face to face, we learned that he is missing 14 of his permanent teeth, and several of the teeth that he does have are either small or misshapen. Our initial treatment plan was to close the gaps in his upper arch mesially, to the extent possible with his undersized teeth, and replace his missing premolars with four implants. His mandibular arch required not only the replacement of his premolars but also his central incisors.

I met with Dr. Luis Benitez, a local periodontist. He was excited about the case. He mentioned to me that he had wanted to get involved in some pro bono work but found it difficult to identify where he could use his specialized skills. Hector provided him with a need within his

specialty as well as a significant challenge. Amazingly, Dr. Benitez worked with Astra Tech, and they graciously agreed to provide all 10 of the implants that Hector will need once we are able to position his existing teeth properly.

In addition, Dr. Ed Martinez, a prosthodontist, and the lab that he works with, have volunteered their services to restore the implants as teeth once a proper time for healing has passed. By the time Hector is finished, he will have received more than \$50,000 in dental care, but I am confident his smile will look like a million bucks!

"Now I am grown," says Hector, "but I still believe in miracles. I believe that people like you are used by God to make those miracles, and make this possible with people like me. Currently, I am in a relationship, and I would like to be and feel more comfortable and confident with myself."

It has been amazing to see Hector's smile change, but more significant is the change I have seen in him. When he first came to my office, his mother brought many pictures of him throughout his childhood. What started as a happy, smiling boy quickly turned into a child who smiled without showing his teeth, and the twinkle in his eye slowly disappeared as he grew older.

Even with only the initial alignment of his teeth, that twinkle has returned. Hector has graduated from high school and is in the dental assisting program at our local community college. He plans to continue to hygiene school and possibly pursue dental school. He married a wonderful girl and has many, many reasons to show off the smile that is constantly improving.

Smile for a Lifetime offers a wonderful structure to provide care to those in our community who really need it but are without the resources to make things happen on their own. Cases like Hector's have also provided a way to work with other dental professionals for the good of a common patient. By the time we reach the end of Hector's treatment, at least six dental professionals will have worked together on this case. We have truly



banded together, and the results are visibly life-changing.

Dr. Luis M. Benitez, periodontist, tells his chapter of Hector's story

Partial anodontia or oligodontia is a condition characterized by the partial absence of certain permanent teeth, which could include one or both of the jaw bones. As a consequence of having undeveloped teeth, these patients frequently suffer from malpositioned teeth and underdeveloped bone where the tooth is supposed to erupt. The latter is mainly due to the lack of "bone stimulus" during the tooth bud development. Since this condition is frequently diagnosed during childhood, it becomes imminent to involve several dental specialists who will focus not only on tooth alignment, but also in the adequate tooth replacement.

Following orthodontic treatment, the missing teeth need to be replaced in order to maintain the arch integrity and a balanced bite during adulthood. As a periodontist, my involvement requires the reassessment of the bone of the empty spaces to determine what kind of treatment best suits the patient's condition to replace his teeth. I have evaluated Hector, and he will require some bone regeneration to accept dental dental implants, which are considered the gold standard in these cases. I will donate the regenerative materials and the time involved to deliver the implants that were donated by Astra Tech. Once the implants heal, Dr. Ed Martinez will be the one in charge of restoring the implants with crowns as the final restoration. **OP**