

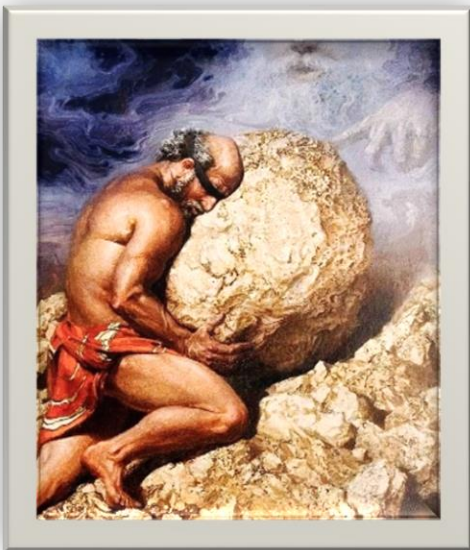


Shared Learning

from the Dental Patient Safety Foundation Reporting Tool

Case 2025.4 – Are we safe enough?

"A Portrait of Sisyphean Futility"



Tangible and visible safety initiatives continue to be non-starters for almost all organized dentistry. Reasons for this remain elusive. We see that once again, history repeats itself, recalling that the American Medical Association initially refused to support the Anesthesia Patient Safety Foundation, “as the foundation might send a signal to the public that medical practice is unsafe and in need of outside bureaucracy and regulation.”

Your Dental Patient Safety Foundation (DPSF) is the first and only federally recognized Patient Safety Organization (PSO) for the dental profession. It is a learning lab; it is NOT a place to be shamed or punished. Your Foundation fosters a culture of safety engineering by raising awareness and providing education as we strive for the safest dental visit. This is accomplished by anonymously sharing infrequent close calls and adverse events via the DPSF Reporting Tool, which can then be posted to our website on reports such as this, so that all can learn and improve.

There is no tangible reward for being safe. We will never know the child whose face remains unscorched from a N₂O fire that never happened. For sure, one can parse through registries and closed claims, cite frequency, and invite comparisons to claim superiority or embarrass opposing parties; but fortunately, such incidents are rare, and as such, evade meaningful statistical analyses.

And so, the Foundation measures safety as the number and intensity of safety behaviors that an individual or group routinely participates in. It is not measured by outcomes. And there’s always room for improvement – NO, we can never be safe enough!

Driving on the safety road is not unlike the condemned Sisyphus (in Greek mythology) tasked with rolling a boulder up a hill. Each time, he nears the top, the stone tumbles back down...for eternity. In spite of the fact that there is no intrinsic reward for either the repetitive (and possibly absurd) rolling of the boulder or practicing safety behaviors, both Sisyphus and all oral health professionals have no choice but to embrace the struggle as our own.

Being safe is not unlike participating in a pie-eating contest, where the prize is another pie.