

Routine (NOT UNUSUAL) Anatomy for an Upper Molar

This middle-aged female was in my chair and reported having a root canal about 10 years ago on her upper tooth. She reported how it was a terrible experience because it took several appointments for the doctor to find all of the canals and it has never felt the same since it was completed. She reported a dull ache after chewing and an “awareness” of the tooth. She was dreading this experience.

First of all, this is a very common theme in my chair. I understand these issues and I am no stranger to having my own complications with a non-ideal outcome. As a specialist, I am better equipped and prepared for these issues and when to throw in the towel. Dentistry doesn't always have the best outcome when dependent on so many variables. I do however, put all of the variables together, with my experience and the best diagnostic tools to help create a more positive outcome.

Back to the case: A periapical x-ray was sent to my office, which helped my planning before the patient even walked into my office. From my experience, I already knew the issue that there was a missed uncleaned canal space causing contamination and infection persisting inside the tooth. Historically, we would take multiple 2D x-rays at different angles to mentally build the 3D image in our mind. I did not waste time taking those x-rays and immediately planned for a limited focus CBCT of tooth #3 to help plan for treatment and educate the patient. Educating the patient is key and visualization works for everyone! CBCT is a great tool but experience is still key on knowing what you are looking at. Retreatment of the tooth was efficiently handled in one sitting. A second canal with a separate exit to the abscess was located and treated. The patient was comfortable. She will return in 12 months for an expected positive outcome with bone healing.

One tooth at a time,
Dr. Phan

First Row: Pre-Treatment X-ray and CBCT screen shot marking the missed canal
Second Row: Immediate Post Treatment X-rays

