

How to Beat the Odds

By Dr. J.C. Goodwin

I don't gamble much. Life is complicated enough with real estate valuations, retirement investments, loan payments, etc. It seems like I already have all of the risks I can pretend to handle. When it comes to my health, I am certainly not interested in gambling.

Medicine evolves at a tremendous pace, driven by developments in technology, pharmacology, even philosophy of care. It is said that the half-life of medical knowledge may be as little as eighteen months, yet it seems a bitter irony that it has also been estimated that the average lag time for a discovery of significance to become the medical standard of care may be eighteen years. The conscientious physician must strike a delicate balance between diligent study in an effort to stay current and taking a risk that the latest information, drug or technique may not have an adequate track record. Yet, predictable risk is a necessary part of medical practice.

My chosen medical practice is in the little known field of dental sleep medicine. I am tasked with the challenge of managing sleep apnea patients using dental-based therapy as an alternative to conven-

tional pressure breathing machines such as CPAP. Mandibular advancement splints have been under development for over twenty-five years, but have only been accepted as an effective therapy treatment

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in the eyes of the medical community for a few years. Now, however, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recognizes oral appliance therapy as first-line therapy for mild and moderate obstructive sleep apnea. An example of a terrific medical technique that took a long time to become recognized and may take even longer to become mainstream. The good news is that the odds of success with the technique are definitely in your favor.

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ant with therapy are reported to be about 30-40 percent. Compliance with oral appliance therapy has been reported to be over 90 percent. CPAP is very effective for those who are able to use it, but many

practitioners report efficacy rates with oral appliances, when properly managed, to approach 90 percent as well.

The math seems apparent to me: To use a medical technique that gives me as much as three times the chance of success compared to conventional methods is a gamble I may be very willing to take. Sleep apnea is a deadly disease, which can decrease life expectancy by 10 to 20 years. If you snore heavily, have ever been told you stop breathing while snoring or awaken in the night gasping for breath,

you may have sleep apnea. If your sleep is not restful, if you grind your teeth, have acid reflux disease, high blood pressure or chronic morning headaches, you may be at risk.

Don't gamble with your health. Talk to me about the odds on the favorite method of sleep apnea management. **QCBN**

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Medicine and the Academy of Clinical Sleep Disorders Dentistry. He has extensive training in the field of dental sleep medicine.



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