

N'Sider

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## Open Wide and Say ACK

The line between an early grave and a longer, healthier life can be as thin as a piece of floss.

For three days in June, some of the country's most respected dentists will be all smiles as they journey out to Nantucket for the annual meeting of The Nantucket Dental Society.

The conference is the brainchild of island summer resident Dr. Michael Varallo, who, in addition to hosting the festivities, is presenting a new model of dentistry that may just end up saving your life.

Most know Varallo simply as "Doc," and like his oral surgeon-father before him, the familiar moniker suits him perfectly. Doc first came to the island in the early '80s, and has been an active member of the Nantucket community ever since. He's an accomplished fisherman, a member of the Great Harbor Yacht Club, and a lover of all things Nantucket.

Four years ago, Varallo joined his love for the island with his passion for dentistry by forming the Nantucket Dental Society. The annual conference hosts world-renowned thinkers in dentistry, and brings local and national dentists together to discuss ways of improving their practices and the lives of their patients.

During the conference, Varallo drills down on the topic “The Mouth Body Connection,” an innovative approach to dentistry that cares for the patient’s total health with a simple premise that “a healthy body starts with a healthy mouth.” He details how dentists can preemptively diagnose many systemic health concerns such as head and neck cancer, heart disease, pregnancy complications, diabetes, and osteoporosis. “The profession no longer just fixes teeth; the core business is people and people’s health,” says Varallo.

When making a visit to his office, a patient receives more than just a cleaning or filing, crown or root canal; Varallo takes their blood pressure, checks their medical history, researches their medication, and scans for oral cancers. Since introducing these procedures, he has diagnosed many life-threatening diseases that may have otherwise gone untreated. “Your dentists should be looking to help you, not just your teeth,” Varallo says. This interdisciplinary dentistry is one of the many topics nurtured at the Nantucket Dental Society.

Of course— being on Nantucket— the conference does have some fun and games. Varallo caters lavish cocktail parties with Spanky’s Raw Bar, hosts galas at the GHYC, and takes groups fishing on his 40 foot fishing boat, ‘*Tucket Away*. The conference goes to show that visiting your dentist doesn’t always have to be like pulling teeth.