



PATIENT CARE

A Chair That Changes Lives: Redefining Dental Care for Patients with Obesity and Complex Conditions

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For many of the nearly 10 percent of U.S. adults who are severely obese, their inability to find a dentist with a chair that holds their weight often prevents them from getting dental treatment.

And it’s not just finding a dentist who has an appropriate chair. People with obesity often have additional health problems like diabetes, heart conditions, and respiratory challenges; many dentists do not have the proper training or comfort level to treat patients with such medical complexities.

[Established in 2019](#), Eastman Institute for Oral Health’s [Specialty Care Clinic](#) was the first of its kind in the region to reduce these barriers to care. Partnering with the patient’s physicians, EIOH’s experienced dentists and specialists are trained to comfortably treat people with cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, heart conditions, obesity, IDD, pregnancy HIV, and many other conditions.

Among the clinic’s many unique features are a special dental chair that accommodates wheelchair users and people who weigh more than the 450-lb limit of most dental chairs.

Designed in England, it took many iterations before arriving at this model.



The special chair at Eastman Institute accommodates bariatric patients, unlike standard dental chairs.



The dental chair in Specialty Care has two main parts, allowing it to be used for both wheelchair users and bariatric patients.

Previously, patients were treated in their wheelchairs, requiring them to tilt their heads back for dental work. A strain to the dentist’s back and the patient’s neck, was not ideal.

Designers set out to create a system that would provide better support and safety for both patients and dental professionals. The ideal solution involved positioning the patient while he or she remained seated in the wheelchair, with an adjustable and supportive backrest to ensure proper positioning during treatment.

The first designs were for a device built into the floor, but it soon became clear that a more flexible, non-permanent solution was needed, leading to the Compact Wheelchair Recliner in 2007, a floor-based version of the original design that could accommodate much higher weights. The company, [Design Specific](#), continued to refine the chair, adding the Bariatric Bench and an improved headrest, providing better support for patients who do not use a wheelchair.

The final product incorporated additional features, such as a larger backrest and

safety switches to protect users’ hands and feet.

When EIOH purchased the chair, there were only 75 in the U.S., with Design Specific being the primary manufacturer worldwide. Today, that number has doubled. Design modifications over the last five years have yielded a chair that can now accommodate 1000 pounds.

Since its opening, Eastman’s Specialty Care clinic has treated an increasing number of patients with medically complex conditions who travel long distances for care by its specialists.

Like [Michael Pedroncelli](#), who was experiencing dental pain for months, but was turned away by several dentists because of his weight. He learned about EIOH through an internet search and didn’t mind the three-hour one-way drive there.

“It’s been a fantastic experience from the moment I called Eastman Dental,” he said.



Dr. Nadia Stephens was able to treat Michael’s dental pain after he faced barriers at other clinics.

He was treated by [Dr. Nadia Stephens](#), Specialty Care’s assistant director and a leading expert on bariatric care in dentistry.

“We are dedicated to ensuring that everyone receives the care they deserve in a dignified and efficient manner,” said Dr. Stephens, who was invited to present at the recent [International Conference on Obesity and Chronic Diseases](#) in London, England. During her remarks, she emphasized the importance of having coordinated training among medical and dental providers for treating bariatric patients with an interdisciplinary approach.

While she was there, she toured Design Specific’s manufacturing plant and learned about the new features of the latest models.



The chair allows wheelchair users to receive dental treatment more comfortably.

“We are delighted that the clinic has been able to help so many people who previously were unable to receive dental care,” added Dr. Stephens. “As the population ages and the demand continues to increase, we’re especially pleased to be training the next generation of dentists and dental specialists to provide high-quality care for this unique population.”

Tags

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