

Dr. Mark Sutor

Athlete/Dentist/Innovator

Periodontist Mark Sutor's dental-surgery practice has been thriving in Bloomington since 1991, but his business relationship with local health care dates back even further to his days as a defensive back on the IU football team. As a scholarship athlete and child of a single parent, he explains, he didn't have much spending money. "So I sold my plasma," he recalls. "That's where I got my date money."

Nowadays he doesn't need to resort to such measures. His dental specialty, periodontology, deals with gum disease, a condition that affects three out of four Americans by age 45, he says. Although most cases won't advance beyond the disease's milder stage of gingivitis, serious periodontal problems can require surgical removal of damaged tissue, bone- or gum-grafting, and dental implants to replace lost teeth.

To stay on the cutting edge of this high-tech specialty, Sutor, 48, has done what would be unthinkable in many medical circles: He has organized an ongoing gathering of local dentists to discuss emerging ideas and innovations.

These would-be competitors come together each month as Hoosiers for Dental Excellence, forming what Sutor describes as "a dental school without walls."

The group of 26 dentists invites speakers, travels to conferences, and brings in patients with "multi-disciplinary" oral-health issues so that the diverse team of professionals can recommend a plan of action. "We examine the patient's mouth and talk about their condition, and they wind up with twenty-six different opinions for nothing," he explains.

When he's not immersed in CAT scans and laser beams, Sutor stays connected to his IU days by volunteering with his fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon; contributing to the Varsity Club foundation that funds scholarship athletes; and serving as a coach for the Bloomington High School South football team. "It's my personal anxiety-reliever," he says of coaching.

Although he admits to having felt some disappointment when he tried out unsuccessfully for the New York Jets following college, Sutor



Sutor: a team player. Photo by Adam Reynolds

says his experience as an athlete prepared him well for his surgical career. "Athletics teaches you how to work hard, be organized, plan, and set goals for yourself," he says. "I equate tackling the technical difficulty of a lot of the surgeries I do to being an athlete who never settles on being good enough."

—Elisabeth Andrews