

Cosmetic Dentistry Is Now the Standard

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New technology, procedures make good-looking teeth easier for everyone 12:28 PM CDT on Thursday, April 10, 2008

By Susan Kreimer, Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

(Thanks to technical advances and consumer demand, cosmetic dentistry has come a long way.)

"It's extraordinary what cosmetic dentists can do these days," said Dr. Lorin Berland of the Dallas Dental Spa.

"Early cosmetic dentistry consisted of unnatural porcelain crowns with metal rings around the gum, 'tin-can' braces, and in the extreme, removing ugly teeth and replacing them with dentures."

Now there are better whitening techniques, implants, veneers, porcelain crowns, clear braces and more. The demand for skilled cosmetic dental professionals is growing constantly — and not just for dentists, but also for their vital assistants and laboratory technicians.

"Cosmetic dentistry has really become the standard for dentists who would consider themselves true artisans in their trade, and have the case photos to prove it," said marketing professional Zach Hoffman of Fort Lauderdale, Fla. In March 2007, he helped launch the American Cosmetic Dental Association with his father, Dr. Howard J. Hoffman, a general and cosmetic dentist.



While a few dentists devote all their time to cosmetic procedures, most still operate general practices that incorporate aesthetics. Among those who opted to specialize is Dr. Gregory M. Lutke of Dallas Dental Solutions in Plano.

Dr. Lutke, 50, has two dental businesses. His practice deals solely with aesthetic dentistry, and his other company teaches digital photography and dental imaging to dentists and lab technicians.

"There really is an art to providing each patient with his or her most aesthetic result," he said. And "the ceramist [laboratory technician] is a key partner in the cosmetic process."
Postgraduate Work

Dental professionals have acquired these skills through postgraduate continuing education at an additional expense. High-level aesthetic procedures are not part of the general dental curriculum, Dr. Lutke said. But with advanced training, cosmetic dentistry can be highly profitable.

The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry offers a rigorous credentialing process for gaining accreditation. Members also can attend annual meetings and hands-on courses to hone skills and learn the newest techniques, said Laura Kelly, an accredited ceramist in San Ramon, Calif., who is the academy's president.

"Demand is high. We have seen an increase overall in dentistry, and specifically, cosmetic tooth-colored restorations have grown in demand," said Ms. Kelly, 44, who also owns a full-service dental laboratory that makes veneers, crowns, bridges and other fixtures.

"Patients' expectations are higher, and they are requesting more natural-looking teeth than ever before. [There's] consumer awareness through the media, shows like Extreme Makeover," she said.

"The desire for whiter-looking teeth is at an all-time high."

Aside from further education, cosmetic dentistry requires "greater hand finesse as well as a sense of touch," said Dr. Berland, 52, who has practiced in Dallas' downtown Arts District for 23 years. "Most importantly, a cosmetic dentist must develop an 'eye' to create teeth that complement the personality and the physical attributes of the patient."

Designing A Smile

In designing a smile, the dentist should communicate visually with the patient whenever possible. That's why Dr. Berland conceived a Smile Guide displaying 18 choices from which patients can select what's best for them.

He got his start at a dental laboratory while in high school. Later, he worked as a dental lab technician for a dentist.

"It was creating lifelike dentures for our patients that rejuvenated not just their smile, but their whole face, that convinced me to pursue being a dentist," Dr. Berland said. "It was thanks to these experiences that I was able to be right there at the beginning of cosmetic dentistry."