

Lorin
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Arts District Dentistry

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It looks like Dr. Berland started another major trend when he started the **Dallas Dental Spa** 8 years ago!

But are some dentists going too far?

elow for details

Taking the **Bite** Out

Dental techniques to ease your pain



David Friedman / MSNBC.com



With a patient holding the remote control for a massaging chair, Steven Katz performs dental work at Smiles on Broadway in Malverne, N.Y.

Lie back and be pampered ... in the dental chair

Aromatherapy, massage among spa-like amenities in some offices

By Merritt McKinney

MSNBC contributor

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"I like to go to the dentist." Those are words you don't hear every day.

But then Terri Brunjes, a stay-at-home mother of three young children, does not go to an everyday dental office. Hers, Smiles on Broadway in Malverne, N.Y., offers "spa dentistry" amenities like aromatherapy, heated pillows and massage.

For Brunjes, a few special touches -- soothing hand lotion and paraffin wax treatments before her dental care and freshly brewed coffee and chilled water afterwards -- put her at ease while she's at the dentist. As a busy mom, Brunjes says she does not have the time to treat herself to a day spa, so her dental visits provide her a chance to be pampered.

A growing trend, particularly among dentists who focus on cosmetic procedures, more and more neighborhood dentists also are offering spa services.



David Friedman / MSNBC.com

Patients can get a paraffin wax hand treatment in addition to their dental work at Smiles on Broadway.

Besides massages, paraffin wax treatments and coffee and herbal teas, dental spas often have scented neck pillows, massaging dental chairs and personal video and audio systems. Some include cosmetic services, such as Botox injections and microdermabrasion. One Honolulu dentist even promotes a "Hawaii smile vacation" for people who want to combine cosmetic dentistry with a few days in the sun.

Growing interest

Pampering patients gives some dentists a competitive advantage in an increasingly

competitive marketplace, says Eric Nelson, the director of public relations at the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry in Madison, Wis.

According to Nelson, spa services are most common in upscale practices in places such as New York, Texas, California and Atlanta, but he says spa dentistry is "starting to pop up in places that you wouldn't think of."

Mary Govoni, the president of the dental practice consulting firm Clinical Dynamics, says "interest in the concept is certainly growing" based on the response to a presentation she gave at a meeting of the Chicago Dental Society last year.

"I think that spa services can only enhance dental practices, since these types of services tend to be stress-relievers and they can help reduce the apprehension of many patients regarding dental treatment," Govoni says.

Some of the special touches offered by spa dentists:

- Massage
- Paraffin hand treatments
- Herbal teas
- Fleece blankets
- Videos and CDs
- Botox injections
- Microdermabrasion

Immediately upon entering the lavender-scented lobby of Smiles on Broadway, patients are given a list of amenities to help them breathe easier, including freshly brewed coffee or tea, a massaging back pad, fleece blanket, and a warm, scented neck pillow. They can also select from a variety of video tapes or compact discs to enjoy during their visit.

"We keep track of it so that when they come into the next appointment, we have the room set up with the things they already like," says dentist Steven Katz. All patients are given a call in the evening to make sure everything has turned out well.

"If you can make the dental environment, which is not typically one of the most favorite places to be, something that is a little more appealing, then they will look forward more to coming," Katz says.

Extras may cost you

All these extras don't come for free, though. At most practices, these amenities are included in the cost of dental services, but since many dentists who offer spa features concentrate on cosmetic dentistry, these dental fees are often not covered by insurance. At Smiles on Broadway, Katz and his partner Dominique Lizzio offer both general and cosmetic dental services, but the practice accepts only limited insurance. And prices are higher than at other area dentists, Katz says.

Rosemary Martin, a patient of Katz, says the care she receives is "worth the little bit of extra money that you pay for it."

Martin is such a fan that she drives 120 miles one-way from Stewartville, N.J., where she teaches fourth grade. Martin used to live on Long Island, but she kept coming back after she moved to New Jersey.

"I don't go to a full-blown spa on a regular basis," says Martin. "This is my special treat."

But even though Martin loves the spa services, she says, "It's more about the care, the attention and the time that I get from him as a dentist."

'The most relaxed patient is the best dental patient.'

— WYNN H. OKUDA
dentist

Martin may drive hours to see her dentist, but many patients go an even greater distance -- crossing an ocean -- at considerable expense to see Wynn H. Okuda. The Hawaii dentist estimates that 30 to 40 percent of his patients fly in for dental care, most often from Japan or the mainland U.S. Okuda encourages patients to experience the paradise of Hawaii while improving their smile during a "Hawaii smile vacation."

Patients enter the practice through an entrance that Okuda likens to "the lobby of a four-star hotel," where the sounds of a waterfall and fresh scents combine to block out the sounds and smells of dentistry.

Once patients are ready to have dental work done, they are given a head and neck massage and a scented spa pillow. They are also draped with a blanket and offered a paraffin wax treatment for their hands.

The aim is to provide a spa environment rather than a dental environment, Okuda says. "The most relaxed patient is the best dental patient," he says.

Other amenities of the Hawaii dental spa include special movie glasses from Japan that Okuda says make patients feel like they are on the 10th row of their own movie theater.

Overdoing it?

Lorin Berland considers himself somewhat of a pioneer in the spa dentistry arena. The Dallas dentist said he first got the idea to introduce spa amenities into his practice after receiving a massage during a visit to a California resort in the mid 1990s. When he returned to Texas, he hired a dental assistant who had gone to massage school.

Patients loved the shoulder and arm massages, and Berland noticed that their blood pressure

no longer spiked before they underwent dental procedures.

Berland has gone on to add other amenities, such as foot massages during breaks between procedures, but now he says he wonders if some dentists have gone too far.

"I'm a little embarrassed by the dental spa trend," Berland says. He complains that by promoting Botox injections and beauty treatments, some dentists "are kind of overdoing it."

"I'm all for anything you can do to make the patient more comfortable," Berland says, but he worries that some dental practices seem to be competing with beauty salons.

Other dentists are reluctant to join the spa dentistry bandwagon at all.

"I am a traditional general practitioner," says Leslie W. Seldin, a dentist in private practice in Manhattan, who is a consumer adviser for the Chicago-based American Dental Association.

While Seldin says he strives to provide high quality dental care in a comfortable setting, he does not think that spa amenities would lend anything extra to his patients.

However, he doesn't suggest that other dentists should not offer such amenities to their patients.

"What is done tangentially to make patients comfortable is fine and dandy if done legally and appropriately," Seldin says.

As long as the extra spa services "don't stand in the way" of dentistry, he says, then it's up to patients to decide what type of services they want.

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