

Dental Spas: The Ultimate in Relaxation Dentistry

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Everyone likes to feel important & hence pampering patients seems to be a good idea. Women keep their appointments at the salon as they cancel visits in the dental office because they like to be pampered. A great idea is to turn our dental offices into "dental spas?"

It turns out that making the dental office more spa-like is not an idea immediately embraced by every dentist. Is the dental spa a growing trend we should all heed? Or is it like a cancer, adding to overheads and causing dentists to lose focus on what's really important?

This article is an attempt to help you decide how to position and enhance your own practice.

To ease the fear and anxiety often associated with dental visits, dentists across the country have started creating welcoming and relaxing environments for their patients by adopting pampering amenities and services of day spas. These emerging dental practices often are termed "dental spas" or "dental day spas."

Patient Perks

Services that may be offered in dental spas are as wide-ranging as those offered in any other type of day spa. However, not all dental spas offer all spa services and amenities. Dental practices are independent businesses, so the dentist owner determines what, if any, spa-like services are to be offered.

Typical “spa-like” services and amenities offered at dental spas include:

- Relaxation and massage therapies
- Paraffin wax hand treatments
- Aromatherapy
- Neck pillows, fleece blankets, heated hand mitts, etc.
- Complimentary beverages and snacks
- Music headphones
- Entertainment (movie/video goggles, virtual reality glasses, flat screen TVs, overhead chairside TVs with remote control, etc.)
- Reflexology

Other perks include “spa-like” décor and lighting, pre-treatment meditation and breath work, special sound-wave massage chairs before and after treatment, and facials.

At some dental spas, patients are treated to hotel-style concierge services (dental staff making dinner reservations, taking your cell-phone calls, babysitting or dog sitting and ordering in food); complimentary limo service to and from the practice; and “parting gifts” such as a bouquet of roses, specialty wines and customized CDs burned with your favorite tunes.



If taking care of business will reduce stress levels, some practices will let access to patients e-mails or surf the Internet while getting dental treatment, or take advantage of their dental office fax and courier service.

Benefits of Dental Spa

The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends stress reduction techniques in the dental offices, particularly for patients with anxiety or heart conditions.

Apart from the relaxation benefits and drawing power to get reluctant patients in for treatment, the spa-like amenities also contribute to patient safety while making the dental staff’s job easier. According to many dental professionals, relaxed patients pose less risk of injury and are easier to work with than tense, unhappy individuals squirming in their chairs. For certain stressed, drug-sensitive and/or pain phobic patients, spa dentistry offers a gentler, more pleasurable and drug-free alternative to sedation dentistry, which relies on the use of tranquilizers, anti-anxiety medication, laughing gas (nitrous oxide), etc.

The Cosmetic & Luxury Connection

Cosmetic dentists in particular seem to have embraced and adopted the concept of dental spas. Cosmetic dental work can account for 50 percent of income in some dental spas. Popular

cosmetic dental procedures being teeth whitening and “smile makeovers” (reconstructive dental work, such as veneers, crowns and bridges).

The esthetic emphasis has prompted some dental spas to incorporate beauty salon services also into their mix of offerings. At such practices, you can go for the regular host of cosmetic and restorative dental work and also receive hairstyling and sunless spray tanning at additional fees, or complimentary mini spa treatments like a manicure or foot massage while undergoing dental bonding and root canals.

Some dentists are opening their offices to skin specialists who offer cosmetic procedures such as Botox injections and microdermabrasion too. However, it is worthy to note that ADA recommends that ancillary services, such as Botox treatments, laser skincare treatments, collagen injections, acupuncture or reflexology, be performed by licensed individuals in accordance with local and state regulations.

In other practices, on-staff massage therapists are specifically trained in specialty areas such as temporomandibular joint (TMJ) reflexology and myofascial release – both proven effective in treating the pain associated with temporomandibular disorders (TMD) and headaches. In addition to shorter complimentary sessions with a massage therapist, are also available to focus on jaw, neck and shoulder areas before, during and after treatment.

Taking the luxury spa concept even further, some dental spas promote destination or travel dentistry, through which patients can combine dental work with a vacation to places like Goa & Kerala. At such dental spas, the goal is to create the ambiance of an upscale resort.

Sterile, impersonal waiting rooms are replaced with relaxation rooms featuring elegant furnishings, oil paintings, fireplaces, waterfall music, aromatherapy and lavish refreshment centers stocked with a wide assortment of beverages and freshly baked goods. The bathrooms boast freshly cut flowers, beauty product samples and shoeshine machines. Instead of hygienists in scrubs, attentive dental concierges dressed in tasteful outfits welcome patients by name.

The Price of Pampering: Dental Spa Costs

At most practices, spa-like amenities are included in the cost of the regular dental services, but since many dentists who offer spa features concentrate on cosmetic dentistry, these dental fees often are not covered by dental insurance. Prices generally are higher at dental spas than at other area dental practices.

Services typically performed by office staff specifically trained in these procedures (like massage) are scheduled at the same time as the dental appointment and are billed separately.

For instance, a mini (10-minute) massage of the neck, hands and/or feet during treatment may be complimentary. Once the dental procedure is finished, the patient is free to choose a customized full-body massage in the office’s spa area for an additional fee, which is generally comparable to the fees at conventional spas.

Other complimentary mini spa treatments may include cooling eye gel masks and foot scrubs while having fillings replaced, and hot wax mittens during root canals.

For additional fees, patients can receive acupuncture by a trained hygienist for relaxation during standard dental procedures; microdermabrasion might be free the first time the patient comes for a standard dental procedure, then offered at higher rates for a series of five sessions.

The Dental Spa Revolution

The growing popularity of spa treatments in hospitals, health clubs and resorts/hotels fueled the popularity of the spa/medical combination in the early 2000s. Between 1997 and 2002, the niche grew 143 percent. The spa concept first worked itself into dentistry about a decade ago. Innovative dentists seeking a competitive edge and a way to entice hesitant patients to agree to necessary dental treatment began incorporating the techniques and procedures from day and medical spas.

The term “dental spa” is open to interpretation. Definitions of dental spas include dental practices that add non-dental procedures (ie, spa services), while other meanings suggest any dental practice that offers patients a more relaxing experience than the traditional office exclusively devoted to oral health procedures. Dental spas now include dental practices that specialize in cosmetic dental care; offer alternative dental care such as meditation and hypnosis instead of traditional pain-reducing treatments; create a “spa-like” atmosphere or environment, as described above; and add spa treatments such as listed earlier to offer dental care and spa treatments under one roof.

THERE ARE 3 TYPES OF DENTAL SPAS

- (1) Pampering: providing aromatherapy, hand massages, and hand towels,
- (2) Therapeutic: providing massages, facials, and manicures,
- (3) Rejuvenation Spa Dentistry: providing skin care, elos therapy (electro-optical synergy), as well as skin tightening and acne treatments, microdermabrasion, skin rejuvenation, and Botox.

In concert, all 3 of the Dental Spa concepts will benefit patients and your practice.

The key to having a successful medical/dental spa is letting patients know that dentistry is not just about mouth care, but also care and improvement of the face. Photo-rejuvenation, Botox (Allergan), and Restylane (Q-Med) are great adjuncts that complement a makeover with crowns and implants.

Dental spas and medical spas take traditional spas to another level, offering image-enhancing procedures traditionally performed elsewhere, such as laser hair removal and photo-rejuvenation. Non-invasive aesthetic treatments are performed by licensed aestheticians, licensed massage therapists, and registered nurses; dental services are under the care of dental surgeons. (A medical aesthetician is a paramedical who is educated and certified to provide non-invasive aesthetic treatments, is state-licensed, and performs treatments such as facials, skin care, microdermabrasion, laser hair removal, and photofacials.)

Dental spas provide options for more than a smile makeover by extending opportunities to an entire face and body makeover. Patients want to enhance their smile, and while this may start with their teeth, the results can go beyond and offer a solution to brighten their face. The fusion of cosmetic dentistry with nonsurgical aesthetic facial treatments can help to achieve maximum patient and practice benefits.

Step by Step Guide to Starting a Dental Spa Business

Step 1. An Attitude Change

More pleasant days, more appreciative patients, more relaxed treatment visits, more engaged staff and maybe even more money and increased referrals. So, if you are looking to make a change you need to have an attitude adjustment.

It's the start of a new and exciting adventure. Start being a leader and get your staff involved in the planning.

Step 2: An Environment Change

The dentist & their staff need to sit down and take a look at their office. Every nook and cranny; every chair, wall, floor and ceiling. You are what you look like! You do tell a book by its cover!

A spa is a place to come to in order to relax and get rid of the day's stresses. Hence the dental office needs to represent the new philosophy and appeal to your patient's senses. It needs to look beautiful, smell good, sound relaxing, feel smooth and silky (this is a tough one) and taste, yes that's right, taste great. We'll get to that later on but suffice it to say that if you have a place to put out coffee and teas, you can also provide some nice tasting cookies, cakes and muffins or even better, fruit.

The first place to start making a change in your patient's dental experience is in your reception area. First impressions do count. Spend a couple of bucks to make your office a pleasant and inviting place to visit. Normally this only involves minor changes but whatever changes are necessary will pay you back multiple times over the coming years.

Start with your reception area.

Should look more like a spa reception area or your very own living room at home?

Patients should be welcomed like in their home with only a minimal time waiting for their appointment?

Use Aromatherapy products, Air Fresheners and Essential Oils, to create an instant change.

Wonderful DVDs of the Great Barrier Reef (Coral Sea Dreaming) are also a cost effective way to spice up a boring treatment room. If you have a TV in your reception room run a beautiful, calming video. You can also add baked goods as well, which smell and taste great and will be a wonderful addition to your new spa practice.

Treatment Room Decor

Have a comfortable place for the patient to sit prior to the start of treatment. Can you recreate a spa type feel while maintaining the true treatment requirements?

Start using Spa Music throughout your dental office space to appeal to your patient's sense of hearing.

Step 3: Introduction of Spa Services

You can start by introducing Spa Services into just one of these aspects of dental treatment and then, when you and your staff are comfortable, introduce the remainder.

1. (Before Treatment)

a. The spa feeling started in your reception room with fresh coffee and tea, homemade cookies and cakes, comfortable seating, wonderful sounds, beautiful visions each appealing to one of the five senses. It's real easy to make small changes such as adding fresh coffee and tea and then progressing to fresh flowers, homemade cookies and cakes, fresh fruit and the like.

b. Think like a patient. They are sitting drinking their coffee or trying to read a magazine and they hear their name. Start thinking like a patient and they will respond by treating you as a

person and not just another dentist or dental office. Be concerned about their fears and concerns and make every effort to divert their attention away from the things they fear and towards things they want and need.

c. Instead of seating your patient on time, take them in 15 minutes early and seat them in a treatment room (or another Spa room if available) and begin with:

i. Aromatherapy or Essential Oils to mask the odor of the clinic and set the stage for a more spa like experience.

1. Biofeedback has been used for years to assist people in learning how to relax, fall asleep more easily or just provide a moment of reduced anxiety.

2. If your patient prefers a meditation experience you can instruct them that you will be providing a calming meditation experience that will relax them and remove any anxiety that may be present. Place a headset on their ears (hopefully acoustic in nature to block out all extraneous noise) and use a meditation CD with 10 minutes of meditation instruction and an additional 50 minutes of pleasing and relaxing music.

3. Last but not the least is the application of soothing, good smelling and skin appealing cosmetics to both women and even men. There is nothing more calming than the application of moisturizers and masks while sitting and listening to soothing, calming music.

iii. All of the above is a **Before Treatment** experience designed to de-program the patient from the events that transpired prior to their arrival at the office (traffic, kids screaming, boss ranting and raving) and their preconceived notions of what they believe to be a normal dental experience and instead create a new paradigm, one of comfort and relaxation. The patient should enter the treatment part of the visit with a different attitude and a different level of expectation. It's now time for you and your staff to meet those expectations.

2. During Treatment

a. During treatment the patient can still listen to the music they were enjoying during their Before Treatment Experience and additionally have other types of Cosmetics applied to make this part of the visit more appealing sensually, and are both designed to enhance the dental experience. You can also place our **Lip Balm** instead of that yucky Vaseline used so often in most offices.

3. Post Treatment

a. OK. The visit is about over. You've drilled and filled and the patient has been listening to soothing music, smelling the wonderful fragrances of Cosmetics and they are ready to leave. It's time now to let them leave with a Smile.

b. Take a moment to apply either a moisturizer or a balancing toner to provide a soothing and rewarding end to a great dental visit.

c. As your patient is leaving, offer them a sample of a **Lip Plumper**. Every woman today wants fuller lips and what better place to find that than their dentist's office?

d. Now for both patient and staff, and even yourself, treat your hands to a **Nourishing Hand Cream** to reduce the abuse caused by the drying of gloves and multiple hand washing.

e. Provide your patients with a beautiful **Gift** bag with samples of the cosmetics used during their visit and possibly other products you feel they would enjoy instead of a typical calendar or a pen with your name.

f. As they leave allow them to "spritz" themselves with a Fragrance for Men and Women or apply Smile Enhancing Lipstick which were designed to enhance the tooth whitening process.

Conclusion:

The amazing benefits that will accrue to you, your staff and your practice by introducing the Dental Spa Experience to your practice can now be visualized. Changing the way patients think about their dentist, their dental visit and their dental treatment will:

Increase referrals of patients looking for something better than what they have had in the past.

Reduce stress in your practice and your life making each day a bit better than the last and allowing for a more effective and efficient treatment visit

Reduce cancellations and disappointments due to fear and anxiety

Create a more pleasant environment for staff which will increase productivity

Incentivize staff to promote spa products which can then provide passive income to the practice.

Send your patient home with a Gift bag so that they can become your Missionary, telling their friends, family and business associates about their amazing Dental Spa Experience.

Hence overall the steps in dental spa experience can be envisioned to be helpful as you start this new and exciting adventure into imparting exceptional patient relations.

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