

Something To Smile About

Dental treatments are getting more sophisticated with increasing demand.

by CHEAH UI-HOON



SINGAPOREANS may have previously accepted their natural smiles in terms of crookedness, colour or shape of their teeth, but not any more — not with the greater in dental aesthetics over the last five to ten years.

“It’s partly due to the marketing campaigns done by dental companies and also dentists,” says Samintharaj Kumar of Nuffield Dental. “Patients now know what they want — they ask us to straighten their teeth with Invisalign, brighten their smile with Zoom Whitening, and even change the shape of their teeth with the use of Dental Veneers. Or ask for a full mouth rehabilitation using the Malo Clinic All on 4 Teeth in a Day protocol,” he adds.

Bruce Lee of T32 Dental Centre says that patients now range in age from teenagers to seniors. While it’s expected to see 15-25 year-olds consult dentists for the straightening of teeth and braces; adults who didn’t have a chance to have braces when young also get their teeth straightened in their 20s and 30s. Those aged 40 and above might do teeth whitening; now, older patients in their 60s who lived with



“Partly due to the marketing campaigns, patients now know what they want.”

SAMINTHARAJ KUMAR
Nuffield Dental

missing teeth before are coming in for implants so they have better dental functionality and also aesthetics,” he elaborates.

Dental care now applies from the cradle “to the grave”, Dr Lee adds, as patients ask for more solutions to improve function and aesthetics as well.

Affirms Dr Kumar: “The types of patients we see range from those who want minimum interventions to drastic changes.”

One such “drastic” intervention — although it could really be a necessary one — is the Malo Clinic All-on-4 protocol where they replace an entire upper or lower set of teeth. “This protocol is suitable for patients who have multiple failing teeth, current denture wearers who are unhappy with the discomfort or inability to eat or speak confidently. For those patients transitioning from partial to full dentures, this is now a very good option,” explains Dr Kumar.

An entire row of upper or lower teeth can be replaced with just four implants, without the need for bone grafts, in this technique developed by Dr Paulo Malo in Lisbon in the 1990s and popularised internationally. It does cost a pretty penny — from S\$23,000 for the bottom jaw; though if you did individual tooth implantations it would cost at least S\$40,000 for a whole upper or lower set.

The bridges are either made out of acrylic on a titanium bar or individual crowns made and supported on a titanium bar. Nuffield Dental is the only Malo Clinic affiliate in Singapore to do the original surgical and restorative protocol which gives the 98.2% success rate quoted in the dental literature.

“Recently we have seen many advances in Dental Implantology. These include dental implants placed on the same day as extractions, full mouth dental rehabilitation or dental implants and the bridge done on the same day,” he notes, adding that he now does more minimalist surgery which improves the rate of down time for patients and certainly reduces postoperative swelling and pain.

Metal free Dental Implants is also a new technological advancement. Ceramic and zirconia implants are such an example. “Metal-free implants typically have better aesthetics than titanium implants and they’re also better for those with autoimmune conditions. We also see less plaque around the Ceramic implants compared to that of regular titanium dental implants.”

Meanwhile, computer-aided teeth design (CAD/CAM) means that it’s easier to design new teeth, especially implants, and also guide their implantation into the mouth better, says Dr Lee. “Traditionally, dentists used to make models of the teeth and plug them in place but now, you can do a better virtual tooth design for patients based on their facial structure, lips and so on. We can also show patients what they potentially look like with the new teeth, and even do 3D print-outs of the teeth.”

“So there’s less trial and error to the process these days as computer-assisted drawings help connect the dots,” says Dr Lee.