



CREATING ATMOSPHERE: Total Health Environments creates a spa-like environment for dentists, including Dr. Michael Barr, who owns Palm Beach Smiles in Boynton Beach.

nance, repair and cosmetic work — everything from cavity-detecting lasers to digital X-rays to 3-D software and milling equipment that builds a replacement tooth in less than an hour.

The biggest change, dentists agree, is in the materials used to restore teeth. Instead of mercury and gold fillings, doctors now use porcelains and material that look and feel natural. Silver fillings are becoming a thing of the past. "There is very little I do today the way I was taught in dental

school," says 18-year veteran Dr. Michael Barr, a former Navy dental officer who owns Palm Beach Smiles in Boynton Beach.

Barr hired Austin-based dental design group Total Health Environments to create a more relaxing atmosphere in his office. Designers chose colors, artwork and aromatherapy scents. Although the dentists say their prices aren't higher than those of larger, more clinical dental offices, dental spas typically expect patients to pay their own bills. Barr, for instance, is not listed on HMO or PPO plans.

The dentists keep up with the latest developments through the Pankey Institute for Advanced Dental Education in Key Biscayne and the Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. In addition, Barr participates in web-based dental discussion groups almost daily with colleagues all over the world.

Even with all the advances, patients still should choose their dentists based on skill rather than the presence of new gadgets and techniques, Barr says. "I'd rather see a good dentist with a drill than a bad dentist with a laser," he says. "There is no technology that's going to take the dentist out of the equation. You still have to use your brain."

High-Tech Teeth

A massage chair, paraffin hand wax treatments, New Age music on satellite radio, home-baked cookies, a glass of wine, a DVD. Dentists are going to new lengths today to make their patients more comfortable, with some even calling their offices "dental spas."

"I've always had a customer service-oriented office," says Dr. Gy Yatros, who operates Island Dental Spa in Holmes Beach near Anna Maria Island. "I didn't coin the term dental spa, but as we started offering more things ... it just naturally became one. You really have to be different than 'Joe's clinic' down the road."

Dr. Kenneth Mogell of Boca Raton calls the trend "concierge-level service." Like Yatros, he spends up to two hours with each patient, booking only a handful of appointments a day at Aesthetic Dental Consultants of Boca Raton.

At the same time, dental offices are using new technology that improves oral mainte-

DENTISTRY'S LATEST

Word of Mouth

>> Faster caps and crowns — With CAD/CAM 3-D technology, a machine called Cerec 3 designs a piece that fits into or onto a damaged tooth and sends the image to a milling machine that produces it in 15 minutes, eliminating the need for a second office visit.

>> Digital X-rays — A sensor placed in the mouth produces an image on a flat-panel screen, which the dentist can enlarge to show the patient. This technique eliminates the radiation of traditional X-rays.

>> Lasers — A device called a KaVo DIAGNOdent signals when it encounters an abnormality, often catching cavities that don't show up on X-rays. Other lasers are used to cut teeth with more precision than a drill and to make incisions in the gums.

>> Dental implants — Natural-looking titanium teeth are individually inserted into the patient's jaw, replacing bridges that are placed on top of the two surrounding teeth and require special flossing underneath.

>> Sleep treatment — Orthotic appliances similar to mouth guards are made in dental offices and can help alleviate snoring and mild to moderate sleeping disorders.

>> Ozone treatment for dental decay — Dentists are awaiting U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval of a new treatment, already used in Europe and Australia, to detect decay early before it makes a hole in the tooth. 