

Dental Spa-ahhhhh



The anti-aging facial alone at \$125 might not be a covered benefit, but, as L'Oréal says, "You're worth it."

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ILLUSTRATION
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Back in May of 2002 when we first reported the existence of a new dental phenomenon called "The Dental Spa," it was with a soupçon of disbelief. No, more than that — like forehead-smiting with overtones of guffaws and confident predictions of dental spas going the way of drive-in churches within six months.

This was based on our conviction that the average dental patient's overriding concern with his or her visit was that it be swift and painless with the earliest exit possible. That they didn't want to be there was a given and, in fact, we freely acknowledged there were days when we didn't want to be there ourselves. Whether due to ingestion of current anti-anxiety medications or the less-efficient application — from the operator's standpoint — of a stiff upper lip, we and our patients still managed to muddle through the

day with those hovering on the brink of syncope soldiering on manfully.

In our little corner of the dental world, the dentists that we know surveyed their premises they had painstakingly updated with every new gadget they could afford and several they couldn't. Most of us came to the conclusion the dental spa was a crackpot idea we could conscientiously avoid along with a tanning bed and an auxiliary hairstylist and shoeshine boy.

Apparently we were wrong. The dental spa concept has not slunk off into the sunset accompanied by howls of derision. At least, that's the word coming out of Hilton Head, S.C., as reported by Peter Frost of McClatchy Newspapers. Frost relays the news that Dr. James Canham, owner of Southern Smiles on Hilton Head Island, installed a full-service spa last

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February. Canham is quoted as saying his hygienist, Elizabeth Kirby, got the idea while attending esthetician school last fall. Before you send your hygienist off to esthetician school, assuming you can find one, listen to Stacy Dragulescu, Southern Smiles chief financial officer, "We're really trying to take the tension away from patients so they don't feel like they're going to the dentist."

Ah! Therein lies the rub, Stacy; they **are** going to the dentist and they know it. They can see right through those cucumber slices and recognize a dental agenda lurking behind all this frou-frou.

Nevertheless, the fact that the practice needs a chief financial officer seems to indicate the venture is a success. If so, there will be a scramble for Northern Smiles, Western Smiles, Midwest Smiles, etc., franchises that will make the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 look like a stroll in the park.

Looking back, it is small wonder that Hilton Head dentist had to have his attention called to the potential bonanza of the dental spa by his hygienist. The typical male, offered a menu that included botox injections, facials, and collagen treatments along with eyebrow waxing and hand and arm massaging, might decide to reschedule, showing a clean pair of heels. But Kirby the hygienist and Canham the dentist suspect they are on a roll and have formed a new company called Absolute Skincare operating in the same office, according to Frost the reporter. No telling what would happen if you arrived announcing that you wanted to avail yourself of "the works." The anti-aging facial alone at \$125 might not be a covered benefit, but, as L'Oréal says, "You're worth it."

A 2004 survey by the ADA and Colgate-Palmolive Company found that less

than 5 percent of dental offices offered amenities above and beyond the usual music/TV/Kleenex/anesthesia available in the other 95 percent. Our thought is tattoo parlors are doing a land office business with applications that pretty much last a lifetime, even if sobriety isn't a factor and discomfort and massive regrets are frequent companions.

It is not too late to jump aboard the feel-good dental spa bandwagon where the results of pampering are good for upward of 48 hours. Sipping a good vintage from the Napa Valley is nearly

as intoxicating as the relaxing scents of lavender and tangerine that waft over your masseur's soothing small talk. We'll wait for you.

In the meantime, we installed a small, relaxing waterfall thing we bought at Costco for \$24.95 as an initial entry into the magical world that lies ahead. The only response to the merry tinkling of the waterfall other than a puddle on the floor, has been an increase in requests for the restroom key. We will schedule a deep-wallet massage to ascertain the next step. ■■■■