

New Business for Dentists: Fixing Botched Cosmetic Work

By AMIN EPRATI

THE LATEST TREND in cosmetic dentistry isn't a new kind of tooth-bleaching product: It is fixing other dentists' mistakes.

Americans' desire to have the perfect smile—spurred by reality “makeover” shows that follow an individual's physical transformation through a variety of cosmetic surgeries—are resulting in a wave of dental catastrophes, say dentists who repair the botched work.

Since the American Dental Association doesn't recognize “cosmetic dentistry” as a specialty, dental school graduates automatically are licensed to perform cosmetic procedures. Additional training isn't mandatory the way it is for

other specialties such as orthodontics.

“I sit in my practice and wait for ‘the corrections’ to walk in my door,” says Donald Misirlian, a San Francisco dentist for more than 40 years.

Cosmetic dentistry is difficult to define because many of the procedures blur the line between the purely aesthetic and the practical. Procedures that are considered cosmetic range from bleaching to attaching porcelain covers to the front of teeth. Yet some patients without dental problems are opting for crowns—in which a dentist grinds down an existing tooth to attach a cap—to cosmetically change a bite (which usually is corrected with braces when it is an orthodontia



A 54-year-old woman, unhappy with her initial dental work (top), got a new overhaul (bottom).

problem).

Cosmetic procedures, which typically are performed to improve the color and shape of teeth, are risky and can cause permanent damage to teeth, roots and gums if done incorrectly. If a crown isn't cemented properly, for instance, infections can result.

Ronald E. Goldstein, an author of cosmetic

dentistry textbooks and founder of the American Academy of Esthetic Dentistry—which isn't affiliated with the ADA—estimates that half of the \$79.3 billion spent annually on dental work in the U.S. is related to cosmetic procedures. Of that, the Atlanta dentist says, redoing other dentists' shoddy work and misdiagnoses accounts for \$10 billion of that. Several other academic dentists back the estimates.

“For the patients, it's a problem—how do you determine who the best cosmetic dentist is?” says Larry Adleson, president of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), a group also not affiliated with the ADA. He says 15% to 20% of the patients in his San Diego practice are victims of poor work.

Eric L. Fugier says that at least half the clientele at his Hollywood, Calif., practice come with botched jobs he fixes.

fourth.

Some dentists who sweep up after their colleagues' poor work blame inexperience or the temptation to lure patients into costly procedures. Others say that as more cosmetic procedures are performed, the number of mistakes rises.

Experts say that even though further training isn't mandatory, practitioners should take it upon themselves to boost their education. “To do an entire mouth restoration and crowns is usually out of the scope of recent graduates without more

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