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Dentists who attend his programs experience growth in the practice of approximately 30 percent, he said. Many dentists reported a $200-per-agreement increase in fees after participating in his seminars. “The problem is that any dentist can call himself a cosmetic dentist, because the designation is not a specialty based on training,” said Deutsch. “In D.C., where many people use their mouths to make a living, the dentist is no longer a ‘whiter teeth’ guy. People expect a lot more.”

Most costs for cosmetic dentistry generally are not covered by dental insurance plans because they are considered elective procedures, not essential health care. Because of that, many of Washington’s cosmetic dentists run fee-for-service practices, which means the patient must cover the cost of the cosmetic procedure. However, for basic services, such as teeth cleaning, costs are comparable to a family dentist, with cleaning generally running between $75 and $95.

And these dentists and their staffs don’t shoot from the hip. Many practices invest up to $24,000 for a one-year customer service program with the group Manufacturing Health Care. The program trains dentists how to handle patients who are fearful of going to the dentist. “One-third of the patients in the practice have fear issues,” said Deutsch, whose office recently completed a $300,000 renovation. “My goal is to have patients feel comfortable and to defuse the fear and maybe some of the hostility they used to associate with visiting the dentist.”

At the Washington Center for Dentistry, the scent of apple cinnamon aromatherapy fills the air. A concierge warmly greets you and offers lemonade or bottled water from a juice bar. Well-groomed staff members greet you by name. In the reception area, a computer with photos of teeth under extreme magnification displays the potential outcome of procedures.

“IT'S LIKE A PICTURE: Your gums are the matting, the lips are the frame, and the teeth are the center focus,” said Chick. “I can give you a photo catalog from which you can choose from the different styles of smiles.”

Matching colors is merely one part of the procedure. Dentists revising a person’s smile weigh the contour of a face against the size and shape of the teeth. They also consider the color of the skin, the shape and size of the lips and similar factors.

“PROFESSIONALISM IS THE NAME OF THE GAME,” said Giannini. “Just because you can inlay a tooth doesn’t mean you should.”

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To create a dramatic feeling, an office might opt to put an intense color, such as forest green, on the walls. For a restful space, a soothing color, such as a pastel blue, is better. “Lighting is really important,” said Deutsch. “You want to look at yourself in a way that makes you feel beautiful.”

In terms of layout, a single patient room is fine for basic procedures. Two to five rooms are better for a wide array of services. “I like to have several different environments and high-end personal service, and specialize in such costly cosmetic services as porcelain enamel systems,” said Giannini. “I have a separate room for all porcelain.”

She opted to have the metal fillings replaced with white resins. In addition, she had her teeth bleached and opted for porcelain coverings for some of her front teeth that couldn't be whitened enough with bleach. She spent $9,000 for the procedure.

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Giannini stressed that cosmetic dentists “must create a brand identity, and tap into what makes patients comfortable,” she said. “You must interview the patient and find out what motivates his or her desire for dental services. If the motivation is to look younger, you might want to provide an option to only whiten teeth.”

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