



Finding A Cosmetic Dentist

By Ivan Valcarenghi, DDS

You've dreamed about how it would feel to have that fabulous smile! What effect it would have on you, what opportunities would present themselves if you only had that drop-dead gorgeous smile?

Nothing says more about all your goodness than your smile. Dr Ivan believes that *If "the eyes are the windows to the soul, then your smile is a reflection of it"*

It didn't seem possible to attain an attractive smile. There were always other demands on your time and funds. Perhaps you put yourself second to others. Now you are ready to **do something for yourself and give yourself a gift**. Perhaps you look upon it as an investment in yourself? You deserve it!

Precious few things in life are as valuable as your smile. It is perhaps your greatest asset! And not many things look better as we get older, and last as long! A "smile makeover" is a great value, perhaps one of the best investments you can make.

Where do you go? Who do you go to?

The popularity of Cosmetic Dentistry demonstrates that people value a great smile. Some patients have remarked, however, that some of these smile makeovers with veneers appear fake and unnatural. Others have experienced disappointing results, or worse, problems resulting from their treatment. Cosmetic Dentistry can be irreversible, and making sure you have the right place and doctor is essential.

This is why **it is crucial to find a highly trained cosmetic dentist to protect perhaps your greatest asset, your smile**. Achieving a professional, esthetic, strong, healthy, and natural appearance to your veneers takes much training and

commitment by a dentist. **There are very few dentists whom have made this commitment.** Not all dentists have equal skills and experience. Using your fingertips in the yellow pages simply doesn't apply when it comes to entrusting your smile. Some patients want to get the best "job" they can at the lowest fees possible or try to get dentists to compete for a lower veneer fee. This could be a disaster when it comes to Cosmetic Dentistry. In our office, we might even suggest you visit other offices before coming to ours. You will know instantly when entering our office you have arrived at the place that you can feel confident will protect your investment. With a little diligence, you can find a qualified cosmetic dentist for your veneers.

The AACD (The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, the foremost organization for Cosmetic Dentistry) **recommends the following when seeking a Cosmetic Dentist:**

The AACD recommends that you ask for the following items before undergoing treatment.

Before and After Photos - Examine the dentist's treatment results on other patients to make sure his or her work fits your dental needs.

References - Get a sense from other patients as to what type of quality care the dentist provides.

Continuing Education - Be certain that your dentist has taken continuing education courses to keep him or her up-to-date with the latest techniques in clinical cosmetic dentistry.

These recommendations are a guideline but before and after photos, for example, can be purchased and referrals may not reveal the dentist's skill and training. How do you know the doctor has pursued quality training to be competent in cosmetic

dentistry? Some things to consider when seeking a cosmetic dentist:

Membership in cosmetic organizations/Continuing Education

Membership in the AACD is a minimal requirement. With only 7600 members, however, this represents less than 5% of dentists, and may not ensure adequate training. **The 500 graduates from LVI (Las Vegas Institute, the world's premier training facility), represent dentists that have made the time, financial, and educational commitment to perform these procedures at a high level of competency.** While membership in the AACD or LVI is not a guarantee, it is an indicator of the dentist's willingness to learn, and level of training needed to ensure veneers are done properly. These dentists are at the top of their profession and would be very proud of this distinction and communicate this via diploma, certificates and plaques, on web sites and in marketing.

Veneers

These thin layers of porcelain are "bonded" to the outer surfaces of the teeth to reshape, whiten, lengthen, straighten, reduce aging, and overall greatly enhance one's smile. Cosmetic dentists are highly knowledgeable and skilled in using these materials and understand how form and function apply to smile design to create a strong, healthy and harmonious result. Inadequate training and experience can result in chipping, discoloration, gum irritation, popping off of these veneers, phonetic problems, as well as less obvious, but serious issues such as bite problems resulting in ear congestion, teeth grinding, insomnia or interrupted sleep, vertigo and even migraine headaches.

Take caution when six veneers or "No-drill" veneers, sometimes called Lumineers or other names, are recommended. We greatly advise against these two techniques, as they create aesthetic and gum problems. While patients may not like "drilling," only a minimal amount is needed for most veneers.

Photography

One of the best methods to distinguish a cosmetic dentist is demonstrating his/her own beautiful work with photographs. Most cosmetic dentists are proficient photographers. The cameras, therefore, are expensive (\$3500-\$4000) cameras with advanced lens and lighting systems.

In addition, you will most likely see photographs of patients proudly displayed in the office and on their web site. These photos will be of actual patients of this doctor who possesses photo releases for these patients posing. The camera does not lie! **The artist's talent must translate into fabulous smiles!**

Advanced Technology

Does the office look esthetic and have the feeling of being very advanced? **Cosmetic Dentists are technologically advanced.** To manage photo imaging, printing, storage and editing, and to adequately beautify a smile, treatment lasers, and advanced computer functions are required. A cosmetic dentist will also normally have an attractive web site with photos of actual patients.

The Consultation

Perhaps nothing is more important than to meet the doctor. **Choosing the right doctor for you is essential.** Patients are rightly concerned with fees, though obtaining the right skill level and personality match is of greatest importance to avoid disappointment.

Dr. Ivan receives and restores at least one patient per month who was disappointed with their cosmetic dentistry and choice of doctor. As a consultant, Dr. Ivan teaches other dentists and speaks to the public regarding aspects of cosmetic dentistry. Get educated about your doctor.

The consultation is a great way to see the office, the staff, to see if the office is clean, advanced, and friendly. You must feel this office and doctor is competent and the place you want to go for this important cosmetic treatment. You must feel you were listened to and that your concerns were addressed. This appointment may be complimentary with staff or doctor. Doctors whom are in demand and value their skills would most likely charge a fee for this appointment.

Laboratory Support

Probably the most important technical aspect of a smile makeover is obtaining the expertise of a very high quality laboratory. It is nearly impossible to know what quality of lab the dentist is using. Though never done before, I have a suggestion: find out what lab the doctor uses and call the lab owner! This conversation could reveal a lot about the doctor, the lab, and quality. I am very proud of my laboratory.

Fees

You can find a range of fees for your services during the consultation, however, **no estimate of treatment can be given without a thorough examination.** "I find it amazing how many doctors quote fees on the phone!"

This is an important decision, one that when done well, will reward you for many years to come.

The cost of a smile makeover can vary from a few hundred dollars to as much as a very nice automobile. The typical "smile makeover" with veneers, is much more valuable than a car, however, and will last longer. Don't shop for the most "reasonable" fee.

Remember, the right doctor is the most crucial part of this decision and you don't want your doctor cutting corners. You want the doctor and you to be proud of the fees.

Most doctors also work with financing companies to help you afford your care.

Some other clues to be aware of:

- The look and feel of a cosmetic office will be different and should reflect more quality. From business cards (without dancing teeth), print material, décor, and from the initial phone call to your visit, team members are personable, professionally dressed, more customer service oriented, and very knowledgeable about procedures. They would be on time, awaiting your arrival, often with a refreshment.
- Treatment is personally tailored for each patient, and not one of many patients "checked" as in a typical dental office, for example. With this level of quality and service, patient volume in a cosmetic practice is usually lower.
- Consider if the dentist practices solely cosmetic dentistry, or as a part of a general practice, such as "Restorative & Cosmetic Dentistry?" There are only a handful of highly trained "niche" cosmetic dentists so get a feel for how much Cosmetic Dentistry and training is done.

- A cosmetic dentist might be on radio or TV, and in professionally designed ads in magazines.
- Cosmetic treatment is an elective procedure not a benefit of insurance. So cosmetic practices will not handle insurance as your family dentist might customarily do.
- Cosmetic dentists will most likely practice "non-metal" dentistry, meaning no mercury/silver fillings, not even the porcelain covered metal crowns that so often create those unsightly black lines along the gum line. Cosmetic dentistry is "adhesive" dentistry that is bonded rather than cemented. Metal-based, cemented restorations have little place in a cosmetic practice.
- Cosmetic dentists are the most advanced dentists and will often lead study groups, author and be published in journals and speak publicly to educate and teach skills.
- Hours of operation will be tailored to individual patients and normally without evening, weekend, or emergency hours.

Finally, when seeking a cosmetic dentist, consider if the dentist has an attractive smile. Does his/her smile reflect cosmetic dentistry? You must feel the doctor has demonstrated proficiency. In addition, become familiar with normal protocol for the treatment desired. In summary, there are dentists that are qualified to entrust with your smile. With some diligence, the "culture" of a cosmetic practice is distinguished and can be found. Finding a highly trained cosmetic dentist is essential to protect perhaps your greatest asset: your smile! Congratulations on your decision!

Dr. Ivan practices exclusively Cosmetic Dentistry in his "niche" Elmhurst, IL practice. He often writes and speaks to dentists and the public and can be heard weekly on the Kiki Vale radio show, WJJG 1530 AM, and seen in the West Suburban Living magazine. Visit www.drivansmiles.com for more info.