Esthetics as Part of the Customer Driven Practice

Implementing considerations that enhance esthetics is consistent with a practice committed to customer service. The vision of developing a pure customer driven practice is predicated on identification of your customers and their expectations. This article will illustrate the concept of esthetic excellence in treatment as an integral part of complete customer service.

OUR CUSTOMERS

The doctor/patient relationship exists on many levels. One must agree that, without patients, there can be no practice of orthodontics. Therefore, from a business standpoint, our patients (and their parents) are our customers. It is our intent to meet their desire for beauty.

We propose the notion that our referring doctors and our staff are our customers as well. While the referring doctors do not exchange fees for service, they are placing their confidence in us to provide optimal care for a patient whose trust has already been placed in them.

ESTHETICS AS CUSTOMER SERVICE

Each practice requires a doctor knowledgeable in the sciences to properly diagnose and devise a treatment plan for their patients. In reality, many of our patients view us as glorified beauticians creating beautiful smiles. Which of the two are you? A doctor, with a commitment focused on providing excellent correction of malocclusions with optimum function, or a “glorified beautician”? Clearly there is a balance in our energy spent focusing on function and esthetics. It would be a gross mistake to overlook either objective in treatment.

What follows is a brief list of some orthodontic considerations for an esthetic smile:

Incisal Aspects: The proper vertical position of the incisors and their incisal edges has been discussed repeatedly in the literature. One important characteristic often overlooked is that the incisal edges should parallel the lower lip line. (Fig. 1) Also of note, the amount of
incisors visible with a full smile decreases with age. This is an important factor in planning for intrusion/extrusion of anterior segments with orthodontics and/or surgery. Often, the incisal edges are irregular due to mammelon formation, tooth malformation, trauma and attrition. When practical, individual teeth are intruded/extruded to correct this. Each removal appointment includes a conservative “Hollywood treatment” to equilibrate such irregularity as able.

Gingival Aspects: Gingival margin height is an important element in determining a beautiful smile, particularly in patients with a high smile line. Extrusion and intrusion of incisors is again a helpful tool in obtaining their alignment (Fig. 2). When performed slowly, the supporting tissues should follow the tooth movement. Perio/ortho planning through grafts or gingivectomies can also be effective.

Interproximal Aspects: In addition to space closure, the axial surfaces of the tooth should give the appearance of convergence toward the facial midline (Fig. 3). Embrasure form is also crucial to a beautiful smile. From the incisal direction, a consideration not frequently addressed is the establishment of the interincisal embrasure by modifying the mesial and distal edge corners at removal. The lack of interincisal embrasure adds to the appearance of a more mature person as smiles tend to lose incisal embrasures from enamel attrition. (Fig. 4) From the gingival aspect, beautiful smiles have a papilla filling the interdental gingival embrasure. Frequently, particularly in adult patients, space forms in this area which appears as a black triangle. Elimination of those black triangles can be performed by slenderizing and recontouring the crowns and closing the newly created space. (Fig. 5) This is particularly successful when crown morphology is rather tapered. Root angulation can also be manipulated as able. Occasionally, periodontal therapy can also be helpful to restore papilla height to fill the embrasure.

Facial Aspects: Finally, no smile is complete without attention to the surface appearance of the teeth. Bleaching, veneers, and crowns are recommended where indicated for interincisal stains, discolorations, and irregularities. As with all aspects of treatment, these procedures are suggested with close communication with other dental practitioners.

Esthetic Materials As Customer Service: Consistent with providing esthetic results is its execution utilizing esthetic appliances. How many patients seeking a beautiful smile prefer to use a less than esthetic appliance during treatment? Our solution has been to offer ceramic brackets and lingual appliances. Each of our patients, regardless of age, is offered the use of ceramic brackets on their maxillary anterior teeth without additional fees. As a result of not having higher fees for a more esthetic appearance, we have a sense for what patients desire. Approximately 85 percent of our patients have chosen “free” ceramic brackets, and a small percentage opt for the added expense of lingual brackets.

Our office has provided these services for the past seven years. Shortcomings of the earlier ceramic appliances have been described. We made efforts to overcome these disadvantages to utilize ceramic brackets without a compromise of treatment. This is in keeping with the notion that we are in practice to serve our patients and not ourselves. As we have made the transition from Transcend™ to Clarity™ ceramic brackets, we have
found the previous disadvantages, such as archwire friction and difficulty in debonding, appear to be eliminated. We enthusiastically support our patients who choose Clarity brackets over metal brackets, as this is consistent with our objective of excellent treatment outcomes while serving the customers.

The brief overview provided in this article is intended to stimulate interest in furthering our wonderful profession towards improving patient care. This can be enhanced by emphasizing optimal esthetic outcomes as part of our service to our customers. As we continue our education, much can be gained by critical evaluation of the works of ourselves and others to assist us in providing well functioning and esthetically pleasing smiles.