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What's New in Dental Care?

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“this shouldn’t be so hard,” said a congressman who was recently interviewed about stalled legislation. “It’s not like pulling teeth.”

Had he been up-to-date on dental care, the legislator might have chosen another comparison. His thinking showed he was old school.

“With the advances in technology, the dental experience has become safer and more comfortable for the patient,” says Dr. Tina Wang of Premier Dental Group of Wellesley. “Digital x-rays, intraoral cameras, CAD/CAM dentistry, digital impressions, and CT scans enable us to be both accurate and efficient.” (CAD/CAM is computer aided design and manufacturing.)

Yes, dentistry has gone high tech.

“The intraoral camera, for example, is a wand, similar in shape to an electric toothbrush,” says Dr. Wang. “Placed inside the mouth, it is used to photograph the teeth. On a monitor in front of the patient, we can immediately show you what we see, such as tartar before and after



cleaning, fillings that are failing, or cracks in teeth. It helps the patient to understand the problems they have and opens the door for a better level of understanding. It educates them about their mouth, and they can see why we recommend a certain treatment. These photographs also help to document a patient's mouth so that we can compare another picture at a later date. Many patients are impressed by this technology. Millennials already expect us to have it.”

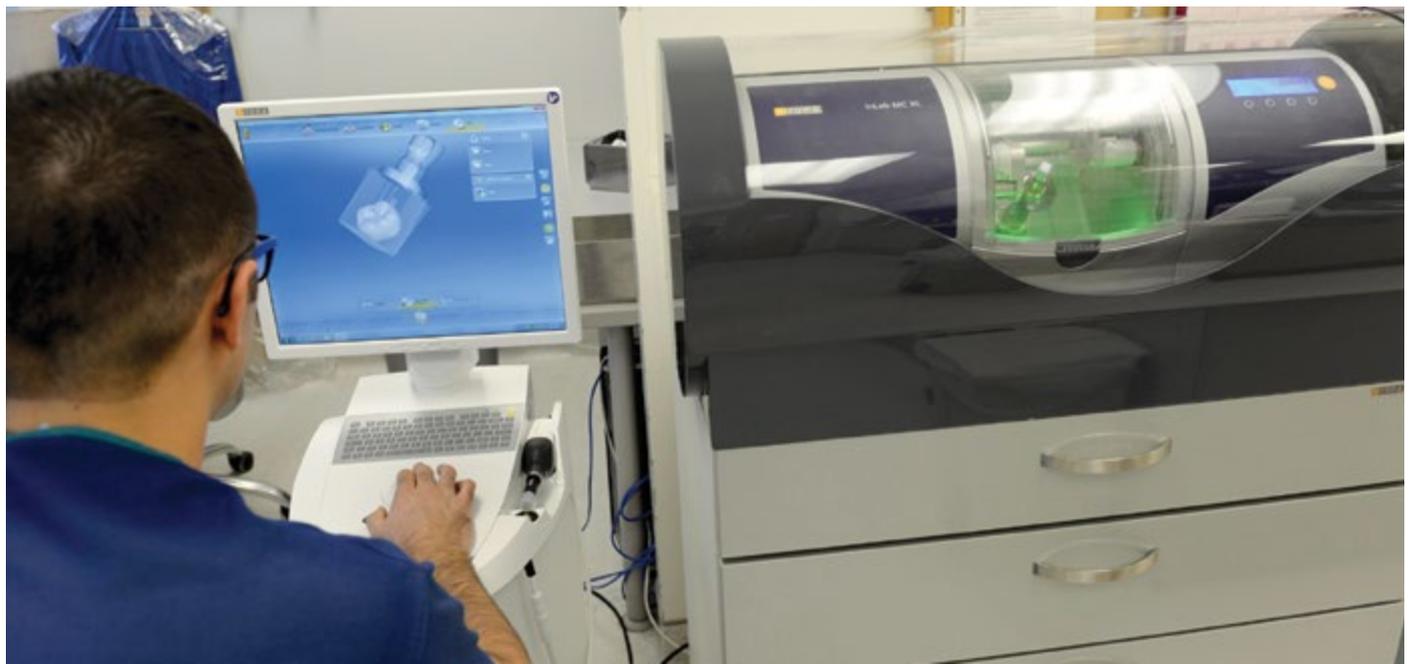
Remember those bulky squares the hygienist positioned in your mouth to take x-rays? Gone. “We now use a sensor and special software to take digital x-rays,” says Dr. Wang. “They are quick to read, emit less radiation, and are very ‘green.’ Also new is the digital scanner that enables us to take digital impressions that are more precise and faster

than the old method of using gooey material. And there’s no gagging. Instead, it scans the prepared tooth and sends the image to a lab where a crown can be milled.”

Like Premier, Wellesley Dental Group is a multi-specialty practice for children and adults. Dr. Ejaz Ali and his colleagues there use a procedure called CEREC® that employs CAD/CAM technology. CEREC enables dentists to restore damaged teeth without the need for a temporary crown. Photographs of

the tooth are taken with a 3D camera. The photos guide the use of diamond burs to perfectly shape ceramic so it can be precisely bonded to the tooth. CEREC procedures give the dentist full control in designing the crown, says Dr. Ali, and having a lab in the office enables them to complete the procedure start-to-finish in one visit.

Not everything is new, of course. Dr. Wang is proud to say six of her staff have been with her for a total of 100 years. Their familiar faces make patients feel comfortable. At Wellesley Dental Group, Dr. Femina Ali considers theirs a family practice not only because she works beside her husband, Ejaz, and their daughter, Dr. Zarah Ali, (“a product of the Wellesley schools”) but also because “everyone here is like our family. We’re committed to the community.



“We visit Wellesley Public School students in second grade to show them how to brush and floss,” says Dr. Femina, as she’s known. “We make it fun while sowing the seeds for good health.” In November, she will coordinate Wellesley Dental Group’s 10th annual Candy Drive, encouraging children to donate their extra Halloween candy to U.S. troops serving overseas. In 2016, students at 33 schools in 13 Metrowest towns collected more than 8,600 pounds of candy and competed for a \$1,000 prize awarded to the PTO of the school that collected the most. Last year, Wellesley’s Sprague School earned the prize.

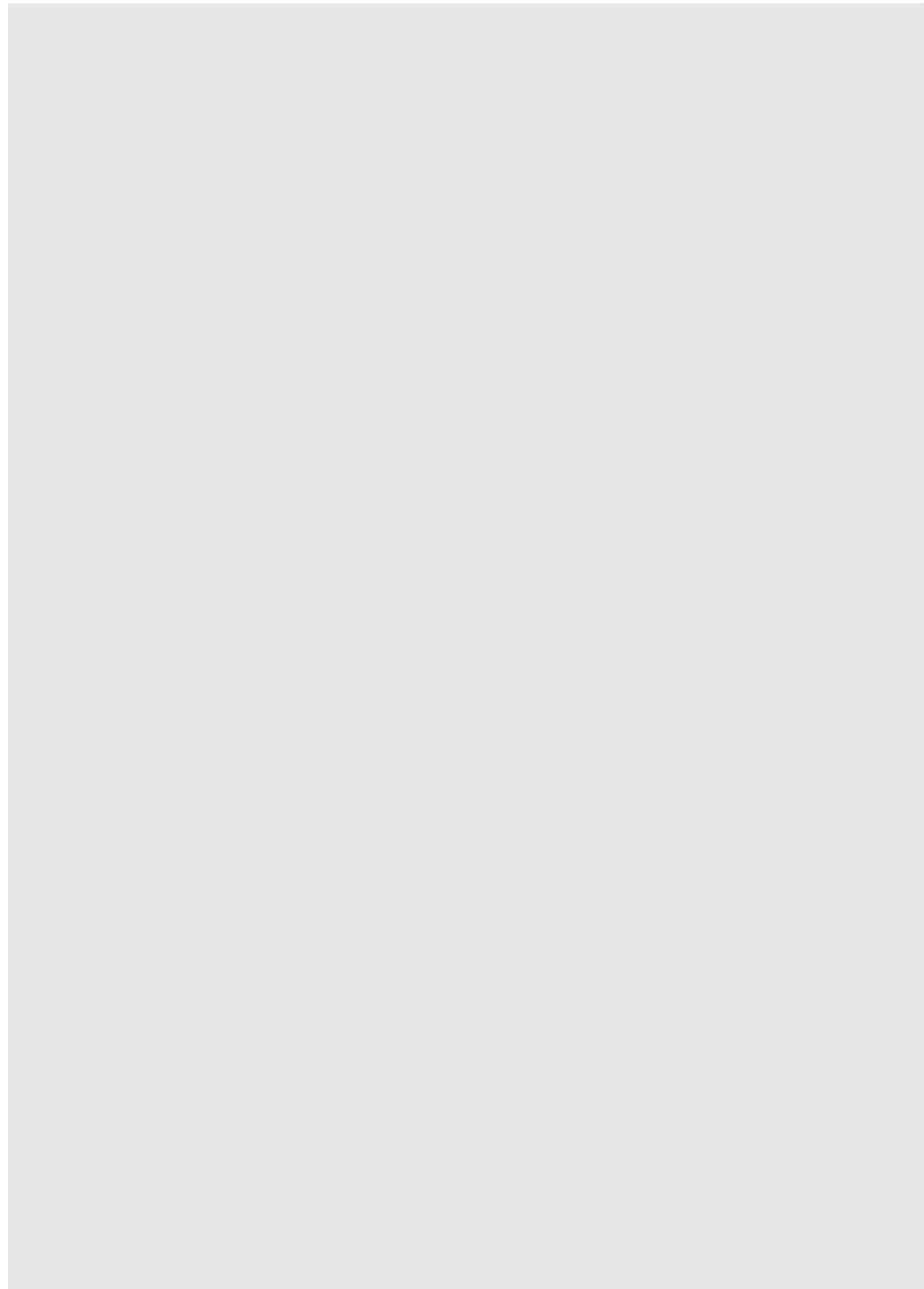
Even dentists’ offices may look and feel very different today. Patients of the Drs. Ali are welcomed into what seems like a comfortable, well-appointed New England home. In contrast, patients at ARID Newton-Wellesley enter a serene, spa-like environment.

To create ARID’s Euro-inspired aesthetic, Dr. Touradj Ameli worked closely with architects to design airy treatment rooms that are sterile yet relaxing. The entire suite is white from top to bottom, with anti-microbial floors, frosted glass walls, and mood-altering music. Dr. Ameli prides himself on their complete privacy; patients rarely even see each other.

“We provide comprehensive dental care for adults that attracts a certain group of people who feel committed to their health,” says Dr. Ameli. “All of our patients come every two to three months for hygiene recalls that include conversations about nutrition. This practice is

about individuals who like to live with grace and healthfully, and you feel it the minute you walk in.” Poor posture and diet are other root causes of dental problems, he says. “To limit periodontal disease, our number one referrals are to nutritionists and physical therapists.”

Dr. Ameli says technology has provided improved ways to be minimally invasive, such as ultrasonic instruments that remove plaque, tartar, and decay without irritating gums. For periodontal surgeries and implant dentistry, he uses Piezosurgery®, a patented ultrasonic technology





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specifically engineered to cut bone but not soft tissues, such as nerves and blood vessels.

“The power of advanced technology can save lives,” says Dr. Ameli. “For early detection of oral cancer, an evolutionary autofluorescence-based imaging system (VELscope™) is used to detect oral potentially malignant disorders and benign growth. [Another example is] 3D-radiographs [that] can show the anatomy of the airway and detect abnormalities that cause obstructive sleep apnea.

“Twenty years ago, and with the use of CT scans, we realized people who grind their front teeth have a narrow airway that can collapse when they sleep,” says Dr. Ameli. “This reduces oxygen flow. We can direct a physician to surgically implant a device called Inspire® that stimulates muscles to open, making breathing easier.”

Dr. Ameli, who specializes in prosthodontics and implantology, is on the faculty at Harvard’s School of Dental Medicine. From his office in Wellesley, he teaches courses over the Internet to students in Sao Paulo, Brazil; Guatemala City; Munich, Germany; Boston; and Shanghai. His colleague, Dr. Tannaz Shapurian, specializes in periodontics and implan-

tology and teaches on the faculty of Tufts School of Dental Medicine. Both are Board Certified.

Drs. Ejaz and Zarah Ali single out several additional digital tools used in their practice for cosmetic dentistry and special health considerations.

“CariVu™ is a device that allows us to see through the enamel to identify what’s happening underneath,” says Dr. Ejaz Ali. “It’s wonderful when a patient’s preferences or health issues limit the use of more radiation, such as following cancer treatment or when a woman is pregnant.”

For people who avoid visiting dentists for years at a stretch, technology can ease their fear or guilt, says Dr. Zarah Ali. “This is a judgment-free zone. Patients who had bad experiences with dentistry in the past or are anxious about the unknown can choose to have nitrous oxide (laughing gas) or oral conscious sedation, which helps them relax while awake. Or they can choose to wear noise-cancelling headphones to listen to music, or watch movies with Zeiss Cinemizer goggles that are worn like sunglasses while the dentist works.”

“Eventually,” says Dr. Wang, “every office will be paperless and invest in new technology.” [WW](#)