

7 Things to Know When Choosing a Dentist

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can learn more about them at
<http://www.PankeyDentist.org>

1. Patient Relationships

One of the first things to consider in your new dentist is whether you even like them or not. As with everyone, some dentists are warm and friendly and others are more reserved. Some dentists fly through procedures while they bounce between two or three rooms treating multiple patients simultaneously. Other dentists will focus on just you and your needs and comfort. If you want to feel confident discussing your questions, concerns, and options with your dentist, choose one who matches your style.

To learn more about your prospective dentist, request a no-charge meeting before you become a patient. Ask about their New Patient process. Will your first appointment be the classic 30 minute cleaning, a battery of standard x-rays, and a 3 minute exam by the dentist? Or will you have a chance to meet the staff, ask questions, and be examined before any treatment begins?

One way to identify dentists who may be more focused on relationships is to look at the continuing education programs they choose. For example, the Pankey Institute is an education center for dentists who are committed to patient relationships. You

2. Franchise Dental Clinics

The dental profession has changed dramatically in the past 20 years with the expansion of professed low cost dental clinics. These national chains practice high volume dentistry and advertise cheap prices for dental care. The dentist is typically an employee (not an owner), and is often newly graduated from dental school. These clinics have helped many young dentists gain some experience, refine their skills and payoff their education loans so eventually they can open their own dental practice.

National dental insurance companies negotiate inexpensive rates with national dental clinics to help them increase patient volume. As a result, these clinics can be a good choice for budget-conscious patients. Younger adults with healthy mouths and excellent dental hygiene who want quick in and out dental care may also be happy with this choice. Patients who are looking for stability and a longer term relationship with a dentist will probably be happier choosing a dentist in a private practice.

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3. Dental Insurance

Dental insurance is a fairly common group benefit that many people obtain through their employer. There are two basic types of dental insurance and it important to understand what type you have and how it helps pay your dental bills.

One type of insurance is the dental PPO plan. With this plan, insurers pay dentists 50%-70% of prevailing market rates. Dentists accept the low fees to attract new patients and generate cash flow. The result is inexpensive dental care.

However, PPO dentists quickly discover that the lower fees are insufficient to pay their bills and make a living. So something has to give. Usually dentists in these plans limit the number of patients they will take, they choose lower cost and lower quality materials, they work really fast, they treat two or three patients simultaneously, and they stop being part of the plan as soon as they have built a profitable practice.

For budget conscious consumers these may represent acceptable tradeoffs for lower cost care. Other patients may find that the PPO option does not deliver the quality of care they expect.

The other type of dental insurance entitles you to partial reimbursements for your dental care based on some formula determined by your insurance company. The reimbursements are usually capped at either \$1,000 or \$1,500 per year.

Dentists accept this type of insurance in different ways. Some dentists accept whatever amount the insurance offers and write-off the balance – though usually they will only do this for regular cleanings and x-rays. Other dentists will bill your insurance

company for the portion they will pay and charge you for the balance. And other dentists decline to participate with insurance at all so you pay the dentist and then file with your insurance company for direct reimbursement.

When choosing a dentist, be sure you understand what kind of insurance you have and ask your prospective dentist how they will manage your insurance.

4. Dental Crowns, Veneers and Implants – Where do they come from?

Sometimes improving your dental health or appearance will involve the use of crowns, veneers, implants or other dental restorations to protect, beautify, and/or replace your natural teeth. When you need these restorations your dentist will make a model of your mouth – using either modern digital imaging technology or good old fashioned putty. The model is then used as the basis to create the restoration you need. The finished product is then installed in your mouth.

The actual restoration can be created at your dentist's office or at an outsourced dental production facility. Outsourced dental production facilities are located throughout the world. The advantage of using an outsourced dental production facilities are that the dentist doesn't have to hire a laboratory technician and doesn't have to setup and maintain a dental laboratory.

The advantages of choosing a dentist with in-house facilities are that your dentist will have complete control of the final product, you can see the color in your mouth so you know exactly how it will look, the turnaround time is often quicker, your dentist will control the quality and safety of

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the materials, and adjustments can be made without sending the restoration back out again.

Dental restorations are made, whether in a production facility or at your dentist's office, either by a craftsman by hand or by industrial milling machines. If made by hand, a highly skilled professional dental technician will custom create each piece. They will precisely match the color and shape of your existing teeth and will be available to help you see how the new appliance will look and feel in your mouth. If the restoration needs to be adjusted, they will be available to make whatever corrections are needed within the office.

Dental technicians are experts at working with gold, porcelain, and other materials to create results that nobody will notice – unless you want them to!

Alternatively, many dentists choose to use industrial milling machines, either in their office or off-site. Milling machines can crank out products pretty quickly – sometimes in less than an hour. The tradeoff for speed is usually in quality, beauty, and compatibility with the rest of your teeth.

When selecting your new dentist, ask who creates their restorations (crowns, veneers, dentures, etc.) and whether they are made by hand or by machine. Then choose a dentist who you think will deliver the results that are most important to you.

5. Continuing Education

As is true of many professionals (attorneys, CPAs, physicians, and more) dentists are required to complete continuing education programs to maintain their skills and their knowledge of recent techniques and

research. You should ask new dentists about their commitment to on-going education. Are they just doing the minimum for re-licensing or are they continuing to seek out new knowledge? Are they involved with local and national groups as instructors, evaluators, and presenters? How are they bringing new knowledge and technology into their practice?

Have you ever noticed how dentists have different letters after their name? A DDS is a Doctor of Dental Surgery and a DMD is a Doctor of Dental Medicine. These are equivalent degrees and every dentist recognized by the American Dental Association must have one of these basic levels of dentistry training.

Dentists who want to learn more than just the basics often join the Academy of General Dentistry, an organization committed to continuing education and reliable consumer information. The Academy recognizes two levels of achievement in dentistry:

F.A.G.D., Fellow of the Academy of General Dentistry – for those who complete 500 continuing education hours and pass a comprehensive exam

M.A.G.D., Master of the Academy of General Dentistry – for those who earn the Fellowship and then complete an additional 600 continuing education hours

6. New Technology

There are lots of new dental technologies available today. Some of them exist to make dentistry safer and more convenient for the patient. Others exist to make the practice of dentistry more convenient and efficient for the dentist. Among the most important technologies in dental offices

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today are digital x-ray machines that reduce your exposure to x-rays compared to film based x-rays, composite filling materials that won't stain teeth like silver amalgam, digital scanners to replace modeling compounds (putty) for impressions, and lasers to replace scalpels for many soft tissue procedures.

Ask your prospective new dentist what technologies they have invested in and what the benefits are for their patients.

7. Consistency of Staff

Dental practices have widely different rates of turnover among employees. If you value consistency in your care, you'll want the same hygienist to clean your teeth every time. And of course you'll want the same dentist to monitor your health and complete any required procedures. Ask who your hygienist will be and whether you'll have a choice if you aren't comfortable with him or her. If you do like your hygienist, request that the same hygienist clean your teeth every time. Also find out how long the hygienists, the assistants, and the dentists have worked together at that office. The presence of long term staff at a dental office is an indication that the practice is healthy and supportive of its employees and its patients.

Summary

Investigating these seven points will help you choose the right dentist. You are in charge of choosing your dental office and the level of dental care you want to receive. There are a wide range of dental services available – just like there are a wide range of restaurants, everything from fast food to high class dining. We encourage you to take the time to find the right dentist to fit your needs.