

ADA **v**B newsletter

Australian Dental Association
Victorian Branch Inc.



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Visual Clues in Dental Surgery Design

– The healthcare facility that has a therapeutic function

By Anne Levitch BA Ind Des FDIA and Genna Levitch BDS

The public responds strongly to the different options that are now available. Since marketing has been allowed to the professions, there has been a move to explore what is effective and indeed appropriate. Generally there is well-founded hesitation to tarnish the excellent reputation that a profession enjoys by engaging in loud, brash or demeaning 'look at me' marketing.

This does not mean that dentists are oblivious to the commercial reality that surrounds all of us. Indeed, many practitioners struggle to find a way of presenting their services in a unique, ethical yet personable way. One pathway that has met with success is the utilisation of professional interior designers and architects in designing healthcare facilities. The concept is quite simple: the uniqueness of a practice is centred on its location and the personalities of the practitioners.

If a dental practice could be designed that reflected the demographics of its location, incorporated the personality of the practice or incumbent dentist and fulfilled all the technical healthcare requirements, would that be a way of signalling to potential patients the quality of services provided? The answer is a resounding yes.

Dentists who have gone down this route have been astonished to find a huge increase in treatment plan acceptance and new patient flow. Financial growth of 80% within 12 months is not uncommon. The sedate and conservative, accountant/banker look that was popular for many decades no longer engenders patients with the confidence it used to do. The general public is now more attuned to the contemporary chic of major shopping centres than the interiors of

cathedrals. For instance, Westfield shopping centres have developed brand awareness, not through selling a product, but by just building high quality centres.

Environment is a powerful indicator, as people find it easier to judge the quality of a service by the environment in which it is offered, rather than the service itself. By using visual cues to promote relaxation, it is possible to design surgeries that provide comfort and context to patients, in indicating the high standard of health-care being offered.

Take a moment to consider that your premises may be the most powerful non-verbal marketing tool available to you as a practitioner. Like it or not, your practice is already saying a lot about you.

To bring a dentist's personality into the look and feel of a practice may sound far-fetched, but designers do it every day for a living. Designing it yourself will certainly make you happy and proud, but are you sure you have been able to project your uniqueness into the finish? Using a designer should only add about 10% to the overall cost, but often that professional touch will produce a look that will put your practice into a completely new level, returning far more than it costs.

The public is still apprehensive, as indicated by a recent survey in the ADJ 2006; 51: 78-85 which reported that one-in-six women have 'a high dental fear'. This is in the primary baby-boomer demographic of women in the 40 -64 age bracket.

By using atmospheric lighting and specific colours which promote psychological comfort, a dental surgery can be less intimidating. When



premises are designed so they do not even look like a dental practice there is less resistance to attendance. We all support clinical dentistry of a high standard, but it cannot be practised unless the patients come through the door. Your premises can attract patients or keep them away. Every practice environment indicates your eye for detail, your technical credibility, your aesthetic sensitivity, and how much you care about your patients; you have a choice as to how your practice presents.

Dental surgery design has come a long way in the past 25 years. The changes have been driven in part by dentists wanting to surround themselves with a comfortable and supportive environment that can act to reduce stress levels. Floor plans need to do more than just put in walls and corridors. Good planning will separate public, clinical, administrative and private space. It will allow for natural light where possible, optimal traffic flow, auditory privacy, OH&S issues, Building Code and Australian Standard prescriptions, as well as visual destinations, and ergonomic considerations.

The modern healthcare facility has a therapeutic role in its own right. Well-planned, well-designed facilities add a further dimension; they can contribute to the health of the patients and the practitioners alike.

Photos provided by Levitch Design Associates. Anne Levitch is an interior designer who has worked with dentists for over 20 years, across Australia and specialises in Healthcare Design. She is a Fellow of the Design Institute of Australia, has lectured in the Faculty of Built Environment at UNSW; Dr Genna Levitch is a dentist with 25 years experience in promoting and marketing dental practices. Contact on (02) 9880 9300.



ADAVB Third Party Committee Vacancy

Expressions of interest are invited to fill a vacancy on the Branch's Third Party Committee for the remainder of the 2007/09 term, concluding in June 2009. The objects of the committee are:

- (a) to establish and maintain dialogue with Third Party organisations including the Transport Accident Commission, Victorian WorkCover Authority and Health Funds on matters of concern to the dental profession in the administration of relevant legislation and Third Party participation in dental treatment;
- (b) to liaise with Affiliated Societies as required in the development of agreed negotiating positions for discussion with Third Party organisations;
- (c) to liaise with the ADA Inc. and other Branches as required to ensure the consistency of ADA policies and statements on Third Party matters;
- (d) to advise Council on matters related to corporatisation of dental practice and associated industries;
- (e) to advise Council on matters related to Third Party participation in dental treatment; and
- (f) to advise Council on matters referred to the Committee by Council and Executive Committee from time to time.

Nominations close Friday 23 November 2007 and can be submitted online by visiting the Members' Only Section of www.adavb.net

Contact the Chief Executive Officer on (03) 9826 8318 for further information.

Christmas emergency treatment

With the Christmas-New Year holiday break nearing, members are reminded to have advisory information for patients about emergency treatment.

As the Dental Hospital will not treat emergency cases over this period, members should advise patients of the clinic's hours – if open - and where emergency treatment is available. An easy way to do this is to include this information on the clinic's recorded phone Christmas message.

Working with Children check

Employers must ensure that staff who work with children under 18 years apply for the mandatory Working with Children Check before 30 December 2007. Information is available from www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren