



By LIZ RICE

Liz Rice is an Eco Re-Source and Speaker.

She can be reached via me@lizrice.ca or at www.envirohealthpresentations.ca

This dental hygienist has ways of making you like looking after your gums and teeth!

One day last month I was in the Woodbine/Danforth neighbourhood to drop off some paper work for a friend and I walked by a beautiful looking dental office. I was thinking about writing a story about dental health so I popped in and learned that I had just discovered something out of the ordinary: a dental hygiene spa. Two weeks later I was back to interview Georgia Thomas, the Owner and Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) at Impressions: The Dental Hygiene Spa.

First I asked how long she's been in business and how she got the idea. Thomas had the idea for her spa when she was in dental hygiene school 16 years ago. She saw that anxiety was keeping people from coming in regularly and she saw the results first hand—clients were coming in with advanced dental problems simply because they weren't coming for regular appointments.

"People talk more to the dental hygienist than they do the dentist, so I was absorbing a lot of information that would make my future business idea a success," said Thomas.

Thomas' opportunity came in September 2007 when new legislation permitted dental hygienists to work without a dentist being present. In August it'll be five years since she opened. She estimates that there are currently about 200 independently operating dental hygienists in Ontario, but there's no other dental hygiene spa that she's aware of.

What's the difference between Impressions: The Dental Hygiene Spa and a conventional dental office? Well the emphasis is on cleanings and cavity prevention. The spa smells of aromatherapy and not cements and glues, because they're not used. There is no x-ray equipment. If Thomas or the other RDH working at the Spa find that you have a problem, or if you want a treatment that requires a dentist, then they'll refer you to see your dentist or recommend one to you. Plus they'll write a report for the dentist at no charge.

Thomas has seen cases of severe gum disease that have been remedied in her spa with a regular series of simple cleanings. When you walk in, you'll see an Oral B electric toothbrush on the ledge of the reception desk. In my own experience, the electronic toothbrush has made a big difference to the condition of my teeth and gums. When I used a manual brush, I was brushing too hard causing bleeding, plus I was brushing too hard in some spots while missing other spots. My advice is if you want a cheap alternative to frequent dental cleanings, buy yourself an electric toothbrush.

I asked Thomas to list some signs that signal the need for a cleaning. She listed: bleeding when brushing, pain or sensitivity, bad breath, or if it's been more than six months since you've had a cleaning.

I always thought that bad breath had more to do with dietary factors, but in her experience dietary factors are rarely the root of the problem; it's usually because of the build-up of plaque and tartar in between the teeth and under the gum line.

Need more reasons to go for regular cleanings? Here's what Thomas told me



Thomas with a very relaxed patient -Liz Rice

about the link between oral health and general health: gum disease has been linked to diabetes, heart disease, respiratory illnesses, and even low birth weight in newborns.

I asked her to explain further. Apparently the plaque in our mouths is very similar to the kind of plaque found in arteries. If bacteria from our mouth gets into our blood stream, it can affect different parts of our body. There's even a dental



Georgia Thomas, owner of Impressions: The Dental Hygiene Spa -Liz Rice

condition called Pregnancy Gingivitis, so if you're pregnant please consider your dental health.

Thomas finds that it's our experience as a child that has the greatest influence on how we feel about professional dental care, for example having a "mean" dentist. Personally I've found dentists to be very jovial people. She explained it another way to me, "If the person makes you feel like they are doing a job and not to interrupt them, you are going to feel like they are controlling you and that's not a feeling that people like."

Children are afraid of getting a haircut, so I can only imagine how squirrely they might be for dental appointments. Thomas has that all figured out. The goal of an initial appointment with a young child is just having a look at their teeth; no work will be done. One benefit of the spa is the massaging dental chair. Imagine the kick that kids get out of that! The best distraction for adults and kids alike is the personal TV above every dental chair. For adults, your hands get paraffin wax treatments while the RDH works on your mouth.

Personally, most of the people I know who avoid going to the dentist do so because of cost. But here's the thing, they've ended up paying much more (both in terms of money and pain) by the time they finally go. Here are some of the situations that my friends have been in: they didn't know that they had a cavity forming (there was no pain), a cavity damaged the tooth so bad that they needed a root canal, they didn't address a minor issue of food getting lodged in their gums and then eventually had to go to a dental surgeon for gum reconstruction! But my favourite is a friend who would wait about 4 years to go to the dentist and then complain how much it hurt to get the cleaning! Well of course it's going to hurt to remove 4 years of caked-on tartar, plus it's going to take a lot longer than 45 minutes!

I asked Thomas to speak to the issue of cost. Services at the Spa average about 30% less than is outlined in the Ontario Dental Association (ODA) Fee Guide.

Plus new clients receive 25% off the initial assessment appointment. Thomas added that about 80% of the Spa's clients have insurance, so cost isn't the main factor why they come; the relaxing atmosphere is!

Impressions: The Dental Hygiene Spa is open Tuesday-Saturday and located at 1956 Danforth Ave (just west of Woodbine) 416-916-6061 – www.thedentalhygienespaspa.ca.

Here's how to find a dental service provider you like

By LIZ RICE

If you're unhappy with any aspect of the dental services that you're receiving, then do something about it so your health doesn't suffer! In a big city like Toronto, we have so much choice about where to go for dental services. Here are obstacles that you may be facing and how to remove them:

- If you've moved and find that you're avoiding appointments because of location or hours, you can find a new place to go. But, if you want your records transferred to the new place (a good idea), then there will likely be an administrative fee.

- You like your dentist, but not the hygienist. I've found that there's a lot of variability with hygienists. The receptionist likely schedules you with the same hygienist because it's like going to the same hairdresser –it's a bit of a relationship thing. Although with much less talking (for obvious reasons). If you're embarrassed to say that you don't like your hygienist, then sometimes switching to a different day or time automatically means that you'll get someone else.

- Cost. If you don't have dental insurance, many dental offices offer payment plans. Another possibility is that usually there's more than one kind of treatment available for the same problem –a cheaper and perhaps more temporary option and a more expensive, permanent option. If you're not being offered options, just ask!

- There's something about the office or office staff that you don't like. Whether it's the smell of a staff person's perfume or they're unpleasant with you, these are all things that could be fixed with a conversation. You can say, "I'm avoiding coming for appointments because I have a perfume allergy and I feel very sick when I'm here." The person will likely apologize and not wear the perfume the day that you come in. Another example - I currently have a dentist whom I'm very happy with, but dealing with his receptionist is like pulling teeth. I've spoken to my dentist about this and even gave examples of her behaviour. Well it's been years now and she's still there and so am I because I like my dentist's clinic that much! In this case, speaking up didn't solve my problem, but at least I know that I've made my complaint to the right person.

Impressions

The Dental Hygiene Spa

1956 Danforth Avenue
Toronto, ON
M4C 1J6
416-916-6061

contact@thedentalhygienespaspa.ca
facebook.com/ImpressionsDH