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Focus / IN DEPTH

No teeth, no problem



JEBB HARRIS, THE REGISTER

HAVE A BITE: Raquel Gluck recently underwent the new "Teeth in an Hour" procedure for her top teeth.

'Teeth in an Hour' allows people to trade a toothless grin for a brand new set of permanent pearly whites

By **MAYRAV SAAR**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A dollar under the pillow isn't going to cut it when you're 37 and you've lost all your teeth. The Tooth Fairy simply can't make up for the inability to eat tomatoes or being embarrassed by your own smile.

So Raquel Gluck, now 69, chose to replace

her bottom teeth with permanent dentures in 1999. The process involved several operations over nine months, but Gluck, who had continued to use removable dentures for her top set of teeth, said she was happy with the results.

Still, when her dentist told her about an experimental technology that could replace her upper teeth in a less-painful, one-hour operation, she decided she could be even happier.

And she was.

"The first (surgery) wasn't bad, but the last one was even better. It was one, two, three," said Gluck, of Downey, who blames genetics for her bad teeth. "I am very pleased with the way it turned out."

Patients across the country will soon be eligible for the same quick smile. The procedure, dubbed "Teeth in an Hour," had been

experimental when Gluck underwent it in 2003, but at a June dental conference in Las Vegas, the approach will launch nationwide.

About 31.5 million Americans are missing some or all of their teeth, but removable dentures that were good enough for grandma are not appealing to aging baby boomers. Although fewer people are losing their teeth as they age, the number of surgically placed dental implants increased 49 percent from 1995 to 1999, according to the American Dental Association — a trend that reflects the growing value of a pretty smile.

Dr. Paul C. Belvedere, a Minnesota dentist who has been teaching cosmetic dentistry for 25 years, said the desire to look good had driven the success of other procedures such as bonding, veneers, crown lengthening and whitening.

“When tooth-whitening hit the field in the '80s, there were many who scoffed at it. But now you can't go through a drugstore without seeing a million kinds of bleaching agents,” Belvedere said.

Kevin Mosher, vice president and general manager of Nobel Biocare's North American headquarters in Yorba Linda, which makes the Teeth in an Hour implants, said beauty isn't always enough. Dentistry is also moving toward fast results with minimal discomfort.

“Ideally, if you can give back what God gave them, that's what people want,” he said. “Patients want teeth now. Everyone wants immediate gratification.”

The Swiss company conducted international trials for three years before getting FDA approval to offer Teeth in an Hour. About 70 dentists worldwide have performed the surgery.

The “hour” in Teeth in an Hour refers to the length of the actual surgery to install the implants. But about three-weeks' worth of work go into evaluating the patients' mouth, planning the surgery and creating the prosthetic pearly whites.

Patients don't see the behind-the-scenes work that goes into making the implants, but they notice a marked difference in how little time they have to spend in a dentist's chair, said Dr. Christopher Marchack, a Pasadena prosthodontist who participated in the clinical trials.

Currently, patients who want dental implants must first undergo surgery that slices open the gums to create a “gum flap.” An implant that looks

like a cylinder or screw is placed in the jaw to act as replacements for tooth roots. The gum is secured over the implant, and the implant is left alone for three to six months while it fuses into the bone and the gums heal. Next the dentist attaches an extension, called a post, to the implant that will serve as the foundation for the final tooth. Once the mouth has healed from that surgery, the dentist attaches a crown — which looks like a natural tooth — to the post.

In the new procedure, patients typically get a CT scan, which is then used to create a 3-D digital image of their mouths. The image allows dentists to do a “virtual surgery,” planning the placement of the implants in the mouth digitally, without having to cut open the gums.

When patients return to the dentist three weeks later, their prostheses are waiting for them — and their dentists know what

to expect. Rather than putting the patient under general anesthesia and performing a gum flap surgery, the oral surgeon uses a local anesthesia and “punches” holes in the gum where the implants are to go.

“They have less swelling and less pain,” Marchack said.

Nobel Biocare is expecting the procedure to be popular among dentists who are looking for minimally invasive ways to improve not only their patients' oral health, but their appearance, too.

“Aging baby boomers want to look good,” Mosher said. Along with younger eyes and younger bodies, people want younger smiles. And replacing lost teeth with permanent implants can turn the clock back 20 years.

“Older people want to feel better about themselves. It's no different than the woman who gets her hair done once a week,” Belvedere said.

But people who opt for these self-esteem boosters will have to hope the Tooth Fairy's budget has grown since they were kids: both regular and Teeth in an Hour implants can run as high as \$24,000.

Gluck says the price tag for new teeth is well worth it. “It betters yourself,” she said.

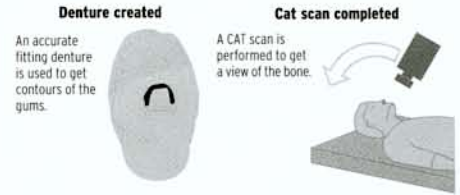
“It improves your outlook on life.”

For more information about the procedure, see Nobel Biocare's Web site: www.nobelismile.com.

A new set of teeth

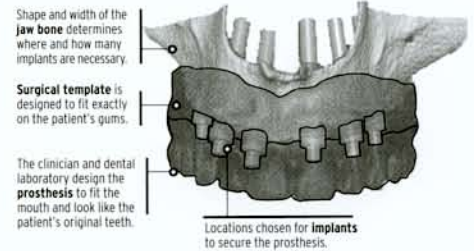
People who are missing teeth will soon be able to replace them with permanent dentures in a third of the time and with less pain. Swiss-based Nobel Biocare, which has its North American headquarters in Yorba Linda, will train dentists in June in a procedure it calls “Teeth in an Hour.”

In the dentist's office



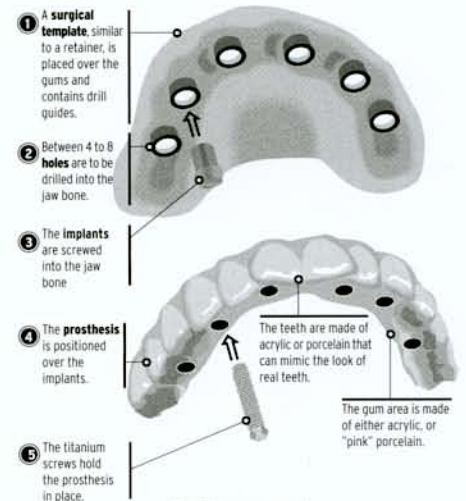
Information combined in the lab

The denture and CAT scan information is entered into a computer program that creates this 3-D virtual model.



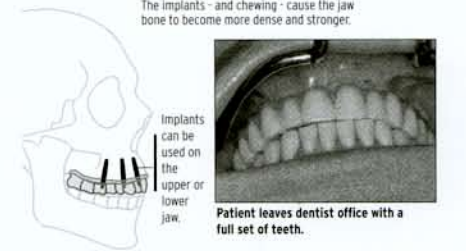
Back in the dental chair

About three weeks later, the patient comes in for a one-hour surgery to secure the new set of teeth. The patient is given only local anesthesia to numb the mouth. The implant is permanent and does not need to be replaced.



On the way out

The implants - and chewing - cause the jaw bone to become more dense and stronger.



Source: Nobel Biocare

Molly Zisk / The Register