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## Massage, Aromatherapy, Oils and a Root Canal

By ELLEN RAPP

You don't usually see people smiling in the dentist's chair, but the woman at the Madison Avenue office of Dr. Paul Tanners looked, well, happy. The dentist had just completed the last of a full reconstruction on her upper and lower teeth, and the patient was enjoying a foot rub from the massage therapist on his staff.

In a city where healthy competition is a given in most professions, some dental practices are now offering previously unheard-of services and other perks, from massages to DVD screenings, as a way to build up business.

"There are currently more dentists in Manhattan than there are in 40 other states," said Robert Raibur, president of the New York County Dental Society, which counts 2,500 members. Yet demand for their services, especially cosmetic treatments like tooth whitening, bonding and dental implants, has softened in the bumpy economy of the last couple of years, according to Leslie Seldin, a consumer advisory spokesman for the American Dental Association.

What to do? According to Mr. Raibur, an increasing number of Manhattan dentists are providing additional services, like digital photography to show patients how they will look after cosmetic improvements. And some practitioners are doing more than that.

Two years ago, Jay Neuhaus decided to give his 25-year-old practice, Gramercy Dental Arts on Park Avenue South, a nudge by

hiring Laura Norman, a foot reflexologist, and two members of her staff, who are at his office two days a week to give foot massages to patients who want them.

About half of Dr. Neuhaus's patients opt for the free massages, which take place during treatment and also include aromatherapy, with fragrant essential oils like lavender, citrus and mint rubbed onto bare feet.

"People come in nervous, even about having their teeth cleaned," says Ms. Norman, who also has a private practice on Park Avenue. "This is a great way to reduce their stress. I've had patients tell me they sleep much better after having reflexology that day."

While having their foot rub, patients can also dip their hands in a skin-smoothing warm paraffin bath that Dr. Neuhaus provides. And the dental chair itself has built-in rolling massagers for the back and legs, so that even when Ms. Norman or her assistants aren't there, patients can use a control panel to get a mechanical rubdown.

Also on hand: a video collection for patients who want a film as background while undergoing lengthy procedures and a selection of teas and cookies baked on the premises each morning. "As you approach the office, it smells like a bakery," Dr. Neuhaus boasted. "So instead of being anxious and afraid about seeing the dentist, people walk in smiling and feeling good."

As word spread of the massages and cookies, business boomed. "It's the 'wow!' factor," he said. "About 99 percent of new patients come to us through referrals, rather than advertising."

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