

# Extracting fear

## New concept introduces 1-step shopping for all one's dental needs

**H**AVING YOUR picture taken, watching television, listening to music through a stereo-set and playing video games is all part of visiting the dentist if you go to Woodland Dental Group in Livonia.

Personalized care in an 11,000-square-foot area equipped to service 400 patients a day is cost efficient, according to A. Lee Kramer, executive administrator.

"It is designed in a special way, so even though you're in a very large facility, you don't realize it," Kramer said. "This is one-stop shopping for all your dental needs."

**THE OFFICE**, which has been open for almost two months, houses the facilities to handle dental needs in a comfortable atmosphere, according to Kramer and Lee Palmer, a national group practice consultant and designer of dental facilities.

"This is unique to the Detroit area, but the concept is sweeping the country," Palmer said.

The patient, who has the same doctor for every visit, can use the facility during an 84-hour week designed to adjust to various schedules. If there is a situation where the patient needs additional care, it often can be handled the same day without leaving the building because of the variety of specialists available.

"It's a large practice, with 70 employees, but it's not large in the sense of personal care," Kramer said. "It's definitely not a production line nor like a clinic."

In addition, rather than having new patients fill out a form on a clipboard, they are interviewed by a receptionist who explains the center's policies and gathers medical and occupational information.

**A PICTURE** is taken to add a personal touch so patients will be easily identified at their next visit. The patient's blood pressure also is taken to alert the dentist to possible health problems.

Treatment counselors are available to explain what type of work the dentist is recommending. They also discuss payment possibilities.

Even though individual patients are a part of the center's clientele, the group plan is attractive to employers who offer dental benefits, Kramer said. In the past employers gave workers insurance forms, which they could take to any dentist of their choice, Kramer said. Dentist's fees went up, and the employer's dental premiums increased.

"The goose that laid the golden egg soon began to die," Kramer said. "The concept of capitation evolved."

Capitation means the dentist receives a premium each month for every patient with the dentistry benefit, regardless of whether the patient receives treatment.

"This is a step forward in cost containment," Kramer said. "It only goes to reason that it will cost a company less to find one complete service dental office than to give its employees an insurance policy that will enable them to frequent the several dentists of their choice."

**THE FACILITY** also is attractive to children who are offered innovative surroundings in the "Kids Area," Kramer said. It includes video machines, a television and books in a room where children can relax.

The purpose of this extravagant set-up is to change the idea of going to the dentist as being a bad experience, Kramer said.

Before the dentist begins working on them in a room that is lined with dental chairs, the children are taken to a "Cooling Area" where they can calm down.

"It's amazing that when you put a child in a room with a dentist how much they can cry, but if you put them next to a peer they act like they're as brave as anything," Kramer said.

If a child is crying or extremely upset, he or she is taken to a room with one chair, which serves as an isolation area to avoid upsetting the other patients. Each chair has a stereo head set, like the type found on airplanes. The child may press a button and choose between four stations on a tape that plays children's music.

A separate orthodontic room, where work on straightening teeth is performed, is becoming a popular area in dentist offices around the country. More adults are opting for braces today than ever before.

"**IN THE PAST** it was very rare for an adult to have braces," Kramer said.

"This is increasing by thousands of percent," Palmer said.

The room for adult patients is partitioned into cubicles where the dentist and assistant have all their tools readily accessible.

Each chair also has a head set to allow patients to listen to the music of their choice. Calming murals of mountains and streams are placed above each chair.

Down the hall is the "Surgery Suite." Here dentists perform work such as

tooth extractions in one room while, in an adjoining room, they keep an eye on a previous patient who is waiting for anesthetic to wear off.

There is also a different waiting area for adults who are recovering from an anesthetic and wouldn't feel comfortable with others.

The facility is convenient for patients, as well as for dentists, Kramer said. Differing from private practitioners, who own their operation, each dentist at the center receives a percentage of the patient's bill.

This type of set-up is ideal for dentists who recently graduated from college and don't have the money to open their own practice, Palmer said. Dentists may net as much or more than a private practitioner, because they don't have to pay overhead.

"It's like they are investing in us," said Livonia resident Dr. Michael Pardonnet, who works at the clinic.

"I plan on staying here, because this is what I like, and it's part of the future in dentistry," Pardonnet said. "I don't have the headache of the management end of it to worry about."



JIM JAGOFFEL/Staff Photographer

Video games are one method used to relax children while they wait their turn to see the dentist. Television and books are also available.

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