



Dr Mark Hughes talks to *European CEO* about the UK 'boom' in cosmetic dentistry and the challenges of running his successful state-of-the-art Harley Street Dental Studio

Dentistry's golden age

Cosmetic dentistry has become a multi-billion pound industry in the UK over recent years and a business that is growing by a staggering 35 percent each year. So why is cosmetic dentistry flourishing in the UK?

Firstly, public interest and growth in the cosmetics industry in general has exploded in Britain in the last four to five years and cosmetic dentistry is very much a part of that revolution. Indeed, cosmetic dentistry is usually a starting point for many people interested in improving their looks as it normally involves non-surgical treatments. We in the UK are no longer embarrassed about taking pride in our appearance and we are very happy to invest in ourselves in this way.

You mentioned some of the treatments you provide above. What are your most requested procedures?

- Invisalign has been the most requested procedure at my practice over the last 12 months. This is a 'clear brace' system for adults that will straighten crooked teeth without the need for unsightly wires and metal brackets. It has proved very popular amongst my professional clients as they can carry on with client meetings and all aspects of their daily lives with almost no impact on their routine. At the end of the treatment they have perfectly straight teeth without any invasive procedures, and yes adults can have their teeth straightened too!
- Enlighten, which is a 'deep' tooth whitening technique, I have found to be, by a long way, the best whitening system I have ever used. It consistently produces excellent results, it's very cost effective and the results are permanent with only a little home maintenance. Also known as 'deep bleaching', this will treat discoloured or yellow-looking teeth.

- MAC Veneers we are now recommending to all our clients who enquire about porcelain veneers. These are wafer-thin shells of porcelain that can correct discoloured, worn down and crooked teeth and they can be used to totally revolutionise a smile. Many people refer to this as a Hollywood smile. These veneers can be made to look virtually identical to a real tooth so the result looks totally natural.

So what kind of people seek out your advice and services? Are these procedures for everyone?

Everyone deserves to have a healthy and beautiful smile and every aspect of society is represented in our client base, not just actors, models and celebrities. What is consistent with our patients is that they are very motivated to improve both their dental health and their self-confidence. The vast majority of my clients come because they want to smile with confidence again or be able to eat comfortably again. We have many North American clients working and living in London who have found that our practice delivers a level of dental excellence and care similar to their dentistry back home.

Do your clients also come from the business and financial worlds?

Very much so! In January 2006 I was invited to be interviewed on a television news feature for Sky called 'Smiles and The City'. It was reporting on the flood of interest from business people in London in having their teeth whitened! Taking an interest in looking after one's teeth and having a healthy mouth says a lot about a person. Having a healthy-looking and confident smile has become vital, in many business or professional circles, to gain respect. We all dress well for an important client

meeting so why wouldn't we want a confident smile to go with it?

How many successful people in the public eye have poor teeth?

Our own Prime Minister was reported recently to have had his smile improved not long before he moved into Number 10 Downing Street. I have many executive clients who have come for advice and treatment. They have felt embarrassed about their teeth, especially when doing business with clients or colleagues in the US.

What about our busy readers, people from the business and financial worlds; how do they find time to come and have this kind of treatment carried out?

One major change with the 'business' of dentistry is that we as business-owners have learned that in a discerning marketplace, we need to stand out from all our colleagues. We need to provide, not only excellent treatment, but excellent service to boot. My practice for example opens very early, will stay open late into the evening and also can provide our services on weekends... by appointment of course! I also divide my clinical and consulting hours between the City and Harley Street so my clients can be away from the office for as little time as possible. Many treatments, such as tooth-whitening, can involve only one or two visits.

What advice would you give any of our readers considering cosmetic dentistry?

I suggest researching the following before making a decision:

What is the experience and training of the dentist?

Check for membership to the cosmetic dentistry academies. The AACD and the BACD are two examples. Ask if the dentist exclusively practices cosmetic dentistry. Have they undergone any post-graduate training in cosmetic or restorative dentistry and how much have they done? A highly trained dentist is usually very proud of all their certificates and qualifications.

Never choose just because it's the cheapest price.

A great deal of skill and craftsmanship goes in to very high quality cosmetic dentistry. Producing beautiful but also natural-looking results is extremely challenging. Low price veneers or implants usually mean corners have been cut somewhere, or the highest quality products or materials aren't being used. Be careful of 'holiday dentistry'! Every week there's an article in the national newspapers describing a catastrophic experience. Remember, cosmetic dentistry is after all a medical procedure and your health and well-being should be the underlying priority. Consider also that the best quality dentistry can last for decades. A short-term gain in price may lead to a long-term loss if the treatment fails early. I urge everyone to think about this treatment as a long-term investment in themselves. Remember, a Porsche does not come with a Mini price tag!

See some previous results.

Ask to see the actual results of the dentist's work. Good cosmetic dentists love to show off how good they are!

This can be as simple to do as looking at examples shown on the practice website or photo albums. In many cases a practice has many patients who are willing to show off their new smiles and talk personally about their experiences to prospective new clients.


Look for testimonials

Honest recommendations from genuine patients will help you to make your decision. Top cosmetic dentistry practices often have written and signed testimonials from their many happy clients. Often you'll see signed photos sent in from happy customers. Many good practices also have happy clients willing to speak on camera too; look for video testimonials! A recommendation from a family member, spouse or colleague is the best of all and a 'living' example of the quality of the dentist's work.

Do they practice what they preach?

Ask the dentist or their staff if they would have any of the procedures they offer on themselves! A practice where the staff have had porcelain veneers or tooth-whitening or invisible braces, believe enough in their skill of their dentists to have the treatment themselves. Look at the dentist's smile – it will tell you a lot!

Follow your instincts.

They're usually right! If, from the very first phone call, you're listened to, made to feel special and everyone at the practice makes you feel comfortable and confident, then run with it. If the presentation of the dentists, their staff and the practice itself is excellent then the dentistry has a good chance of being excellent too. Invest in a thorough consultation rather than a 'free' consultation. You need adequate time to get to know and appraise the doctor as much as he or she needs to with you. If your examination and consultation are thorough, and plenty of time is taken, and you feel you are presented with all of your options it's likely that the dentist will have your best interests at heart. 

Dr Mark Hughes practices in The City of London and Harley Street.

His commitment to the utmost in quality has made him a highly regarded cosmetic dentist in London. Dr. Hughes trained in restorative dentistry at the prestigious Eastman Dental Institute in London. He is a Platinum rank Invisalign provider, a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.

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