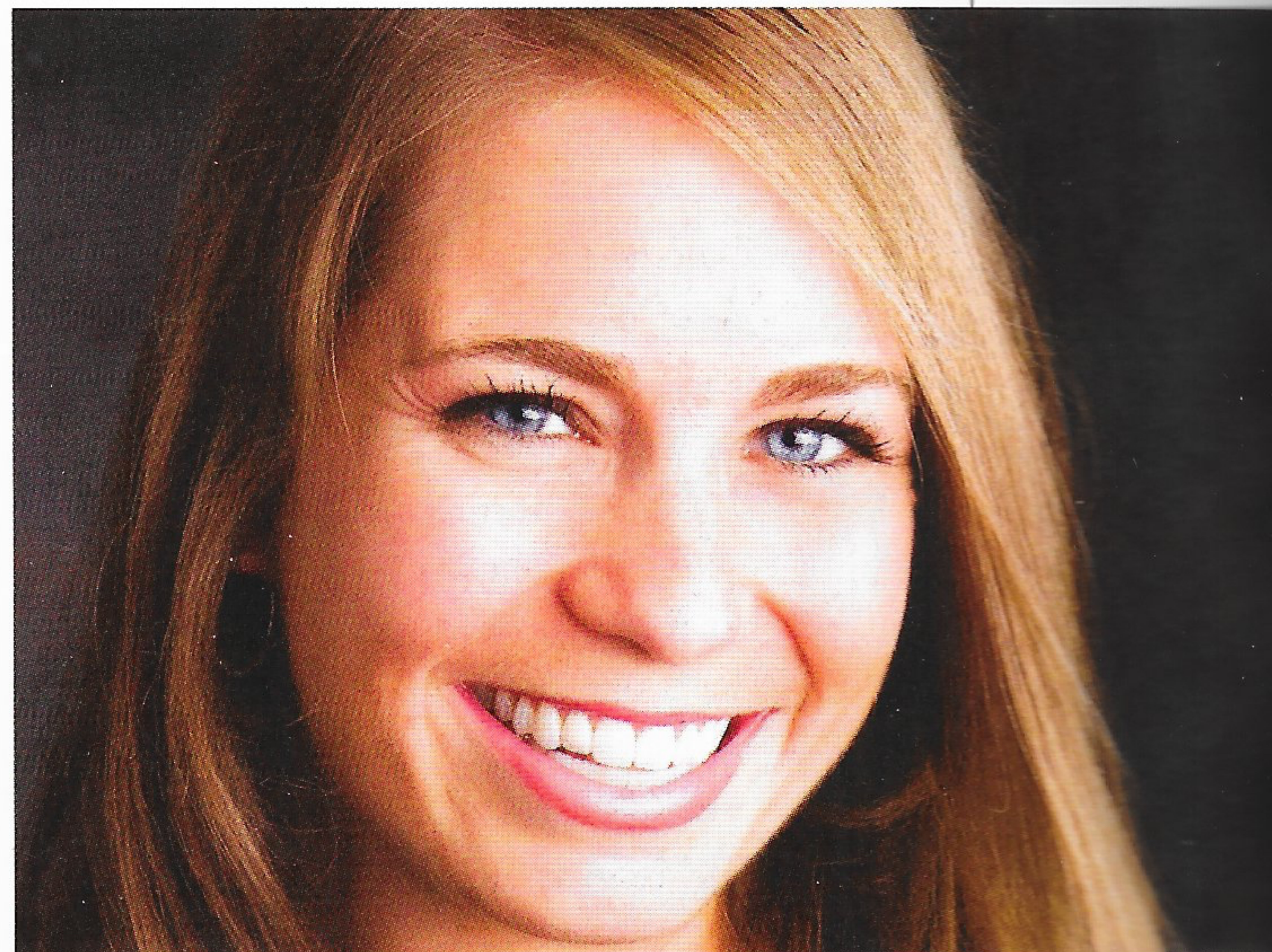


Cosmetic dentistry opens
the door to enhancing
one of your greatest features

A brighter SMILE



Dr. Kristen Berning, of Exceptional Dentistry.

BY MEGAN GLOSS • PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

It has inspired countless poems, prose and songs throughout history. More than just an outward expression, the smile often is described as an individual's most striking and memorable feature.

Unfortunately, it also can be a feature that many feel compelled to hide when it comes to teeth imperfections.

But thanks to the world of cosmetic dentistry — not to mention a surplus of technological advancements in the field — patients are discovering the hidden beauty in their smile. And, in many cases, they are discovering it later in life.

"It can be pretty life-changing," said Dr. Kristen Berning, of Exceptional Dentistry, in Dubuque. "We have many stories from adults who put treatment off for years and always wished they had done it sooner. We had a woman in her 50s who had porcelain veneers completed. Then, she called us the next day and said

that she hadn't gotten anything done at work because she couldn't stop staring at herself in the mirror.

"We had another woman who was a widow," Berning added. "She had crowding and discoloration in her teeth that we fixed with porcelain veneers. That helped her feel confident to enter the dating world again. Now, she is married.

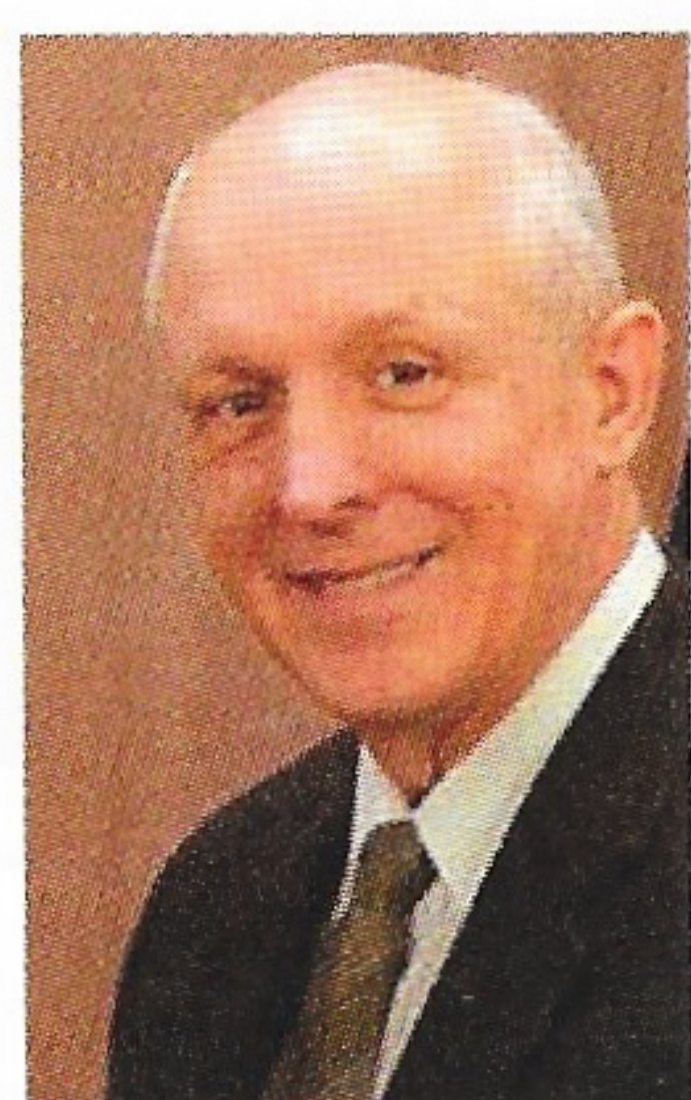
"It seems very simple, but it can make a huge impact," Berning said. "It's very rewarding for us to put our skills and training to work to help people find that confidence and fix whatever has been distracting from their smile."

Berning works alongside her father, Dr. Ted Murray, an American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry accredited dentist.

Exceptional Dentistry and other area dentists shared their insights as to what is available, as well as the latest developments in cosmetic dentistry.

The difference between cosmetic dentistry and routine care and maintenance

When one hears the term “cosmetic,” they might think of a procedure that’s purely aesthetic — not a necessity. But in many circumstances, cosmetic dentistry and routine care and maintenance for the overall health of your mouth overlap.

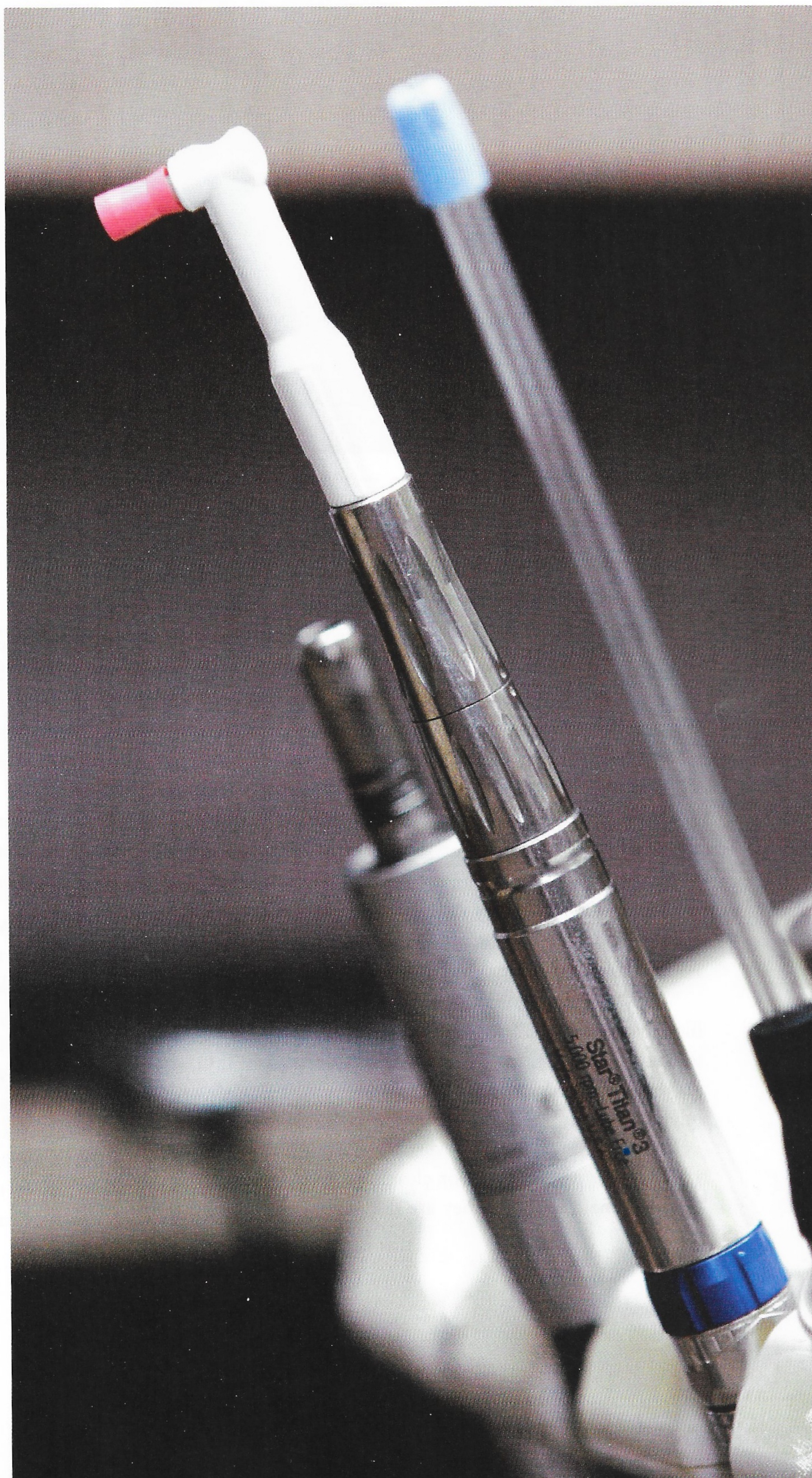


“I would define cosmetic dentistry as the patient coordinating their needs with the judgment of a qualified doctor,” said **Dr. Richard Downs**, of Abbadent Family & Cosmetic Dental Center, in Dubuque. “When you’re aligning teeth, for example, the end result will not only make the teeth look nicer. It will make the teeth healthier.”

Misalignment, Downs explained, often can create a greater risk of tooth decay and gum disease because of teeth being severely isolated, making them difficult to clean — also resulting in discoloration.

Alignment and color are only two examples of common areas patients will strive to improve their smile.

“It can range from simple to complex,” Berning said. “Sometimes we are doing teeth-whitening and cosmetic bonding. Or, we are doing short-term orthodontics, Invisalign, porcelain veneers, or even full mouth reconstruction where every tooth needs treatment in order to restore its appearance and function. It really depends on the condition of the teeth and the investment the patient desires to make.”



Porcelain veneers



Before



After

Invisalign

A highly popular option for teeth-alignment, Invisalign offers an alternative to old-fashioned, metal braces.

Using a custom-made series of aligners, trays made of smooth, invisible plastic are worn over the teeth. These aligners gradually shift the teeth into place.

Unlike their metal counterparts, Invisalign has no brackets to attach and no wires to tighten. The patient simply puts in a new set of aligners approximately every two weeks until the treatment is complete.

“We see a lot of adults wanting something a little less visible,” Berning said. “Invisalign puts a lot of the responsibility in the patient’s hands, so compliance is important.”

Invisalign also can be beneficial for younger candidates, who might not do as good a job of cleaning traditional braces.

However, they’re not for everyone.

“They are much easier for cleaning and maintaining the hygiene of the gums, and they are definitely becoming more ac-



cepted than conventional braces,” said **Dr. Meghan Schultz**, of Schultz Family Dentistry. “It depends on the movements needed to align the teeth. Some of the movements through Invisalign aren’t as predictable as doing it the conventional way.”

For more traditional braces, short-term options and even braces with clear brackets and wires also are available and can primarily help with tooth-crowding in the front of the mouth in less than one year.

Teeth-whitening

Some teeth are naturally whiter than others, dentists explained. But many factors contribute to why teeth lose their brightness, from aging to the foods you eat or the beverages you consume. Poor at-home brushing and flossing habits also can have an adverse affect on a tooth’s color.

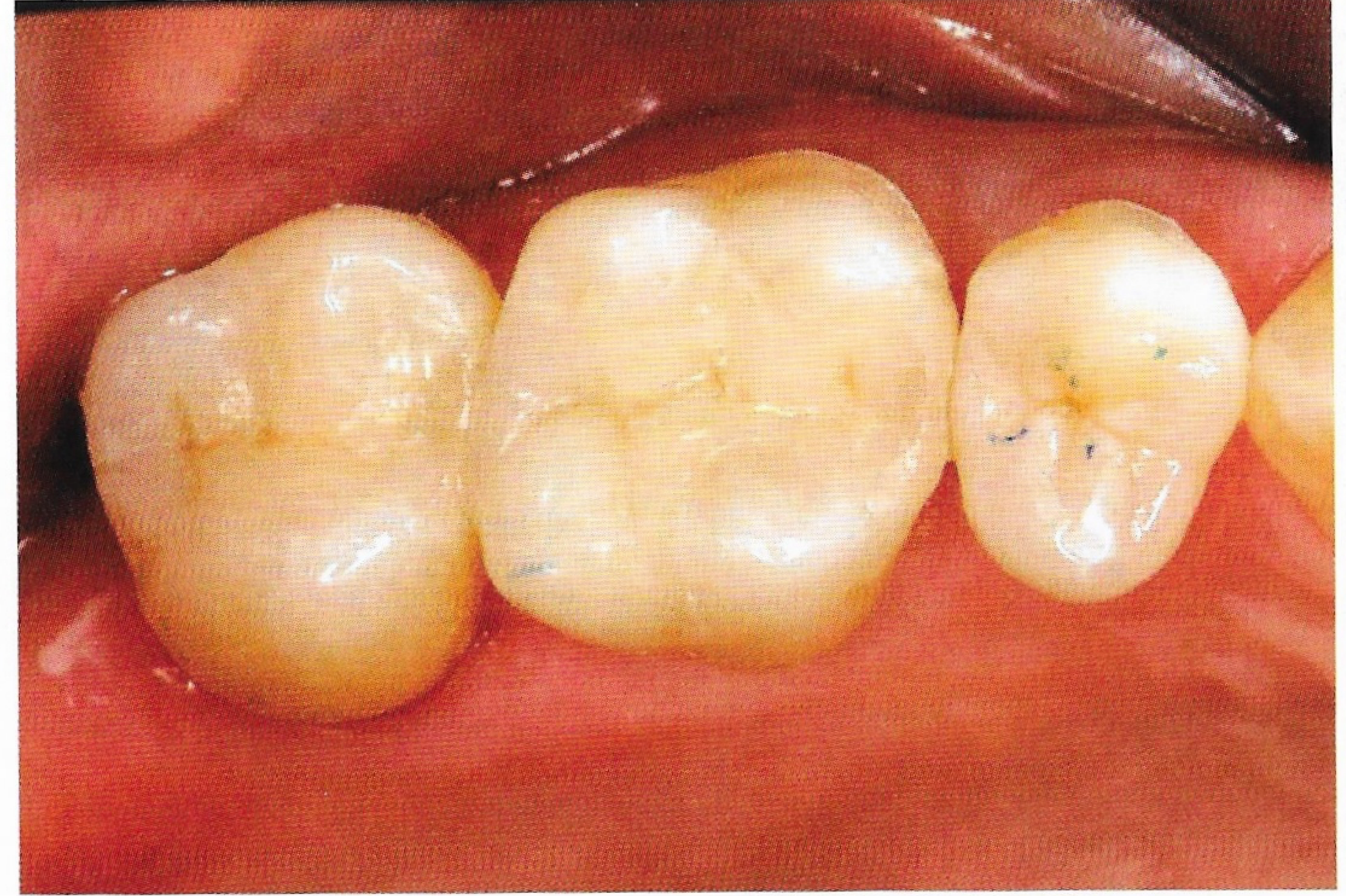
The result has seen many patients embracing teeth-whitening treatments. “It’s the most economically great way to improve your smile with immediate results,” Schultz said. ■

While teeth-whitening noticeably brightens the smile, most patients strive for a natural look, dentists said.

Onlays



Before



After

“People want their teeth to look whiter, but yet natural,” Berning said. “ZOOM whitening and tray whitening are great options and can lighten several shades. For best results, it is important that whitening is preceded by a professional cleaning to remove surface stains and tartar build-up. This combination can help remove years of stain from things such as coffee, tea, wine, or tobacco.”

However, dentists urge patients not to over do it.



“We always try to work with the patient’s wishes,” Downs said. “But occasionally, the trend takes it too far. Over-whitening can look unnatural.”

There also are several store-bought alternatives that can work effectively over time and with consistent use.

“There are a lot of products on the market that you can use at home that do a pretty good job,” said **Dr. Aaron Rau**, of Abbadent. “And, they are getting better and better.”

White fillings, porcelain veneers, inlays, onlays and dental bonding

Porcelain veneers can help correct the color, shape and alignment of teeth, all at once. And, they can be color-matched to a patient’s natural teeth.

Veneers are thin, ceramic shells that are bonded to the front of the teeth. They also resist stains and can last for years with the same daily care given to natural teeth.

Downs said that negative space, or space between the side teeth, also can be helped through veneers.

Porcelain inlays and onlays are a tooth-colored filling designed to blend with the patient’s natural tooth color. They protect and restore the tooth when large portions of it are damaged or decayed.

Inlays correct decayed areas of the tooth within the tooth cusps. Onlays are designed for larger areas of decay that extend to the outside surfaces of the tooth. If a tooth is too damaged, a patient might require a porcelain crown.

Unlike white fillings, porcelain inlays and onlays are fabricated by an in-office milling unit or at a dental laboratory.

Porcelain crowns



Before



After

Then, they are bonded to the teeth when a majority of the tooth structure is missing due to decay or fracture.

Compared to metal, porcelain offers a more natural look and feel.

“And, because it is bonded to the tooth’s enamel and interior surface, it strengthens the tooth,” Berning said.

Another procedure is dental bonding, which re-shapes malformed, damaged, or misaligned teeth. This also can provide protection for an exposed tooth root caused by receding gums.

Bonding can be used to fill chips or cracks, restore color to a tooth that resists whitening, correct mis-matched tooth shapes and relieve teeth that are crowded or too widely-spaced.

Other advancements in cosmetic dentistry

In addition to teeth, the gum line also is an area of focus for patients.

“A consideration is how much of the gum line is showing,” Downs said. “That can be accomplished by laser technology that allows us to very precisely re-contour.”

Developments in cosmetic dentistry on the technical side

Through video, we can capture a three-dimensional view of a tooth and take digital impressions.

Dr. Kristen Berning

have helped the industry evolve dramatically, dentists said.

“It’s pretty amazing what we’re able to do with digital technology,” Berning said. “We can view digital photos instantly with patients so they can decide what they do or don’t like about their teeth. This lets the patient and the doctor can develop a plan together. Invisalign works with CAD/CAM digital technology. Through video, we can capture a three-dimensional view of a tooth and take digital impressions. Dental labs can digitally design crowns. Cone Beam 3D imaging provides 3 dimensional dental imaging and radiographs.”

Dental bonding



Before



After

Schultz said that technology also has made dental work more comfortable for the patient.

“We can accommodate digital manufacturing of restorations,” she said. “It makes the procedures much easier and efficient.”

Rauen said in the past 10-15 years especially, cosmetic dentistry has realized tremendous growth through technology.

“The longevity of the materials alone has made a huge difference,” he said.

But with all that is available to patients, it’s still that simple task of brightening someone’s self-esteem that keep the dentists smiling.

“That’s the whole reason we do what we do,” Downs said.

Schultz added, “Cosmetically, people are invested in their oral health when they are happy with their smile. And, when they are happy, they invest more in it, they want to share it with everybody and they want it to stay that way. We don’t see a lot of people happy about things like fillings, but cosmetic dentistry can change their life. It’s very rewarding for both sides, and that makes it fun for us.” DBQ

Q&A with Dr. JA Reynolds, American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry accreditation chair

What qualifies someone to call themselves a “cosmetic dentist”?

Actually, there is no qualification. Anyone can claim to have cosmetic skills. It is common to hear and see advertisements from those who deliver subpar care.

Is there currently a problem with this in general or from the patient’s perspective?

It only becomes a problem when patients’ needs aren’t met either clinically or esthetically. Unfortunately, less than optimum care does not always hurt or look bad. So many patients don’t suffer problems...until later.

What qualifies a dentist to do quality cosmetic work?

Training, whether it be through an organization such as the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, or any other number of private teaching institutes around the country.

How can patients make sure they are choosing the correct dentist?

Since a majority of dentists claim to offer cosmetic dentistry, it is important for the consumer to understand the differences among dentists due to their training. That’s why a credential, such as AACD Accreditation, is an important benchmark. A dentist does not have to be accredited in the AACD to provide great cosmetic care ... there are many who do. However, from a consumer’s perspective, those who are credentialed are a sure bet for high clinical standards.