

Gum surgery a boon for area dentist

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Dan McHugh had known for 30 years that he was eventually going to need gum surgery. If you have bad gums, losing your teeth is not a matter of "if" but "when."

For a long time, he put it off. He said he didn't like the idea of having the infected portion of his gums cut away, "then the next time you smile, you look like a damn horse."

But in 2006, McHugh found Dr. Suresh Goel, who was offering a noninvasive laser procedure that saves more healthy gum tissue than conventional surgery allows. He returns every few months for check-ups, but hasn't had any gum problems since.

"The procedure is not painful. It's fast, it's clean, it's neat, and as far as Goel goes, you couldn't find a better doctor," said McHugh, 65, of Webster. "He seems to be more interested in my teeth than I am."

Open since 2005, Goel's practice, Progressive Implantology & Periodontics, has been the region's only provider of a laser-assisted gum procedure (called LANAP) that acts as an alternative to traditional gum surgery.

Progressive also does some dental implants, but LANAP accounts for most of the company's business.

Goel guesses that he's the world's leading provider of the procedure, as he owns five of the LANAP-specialized PerioLase machines, more than anyone else on the planet. The PerioLase machines are made by a California firm.

The laser procedure was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2004. And LANAP has spurred rapid growth for Progressive, having grown from its original office in Pittsford to add locations in Geneseo, Greece and -- earlier this month -- Webster. A fifth location is planned for Canandaigua in 2010.

The company, which employs 17, declined to share revenues.

The procedure selectively removes the diseased areas of a person's gums while sparing healthy tissue, allowing the uninfected portion to regenerate.

Traditional gum surgery cuts away and removes the infected tissue and everything around it, which Goel likened to getting a cut and infection in a finger, and treating it by lopping the whole finger off. "If the treatment is removing a third of your gums, the cure is worse than the disease in some ways," said Goel.

In addition to offering a painless procedure with minimal recovery times, LANAP's short treatment time keeps Goel's expenses low, allowing him to make the process very affordable. Costs can be as little as half the amount of traditional gum surgery, and dental insurance will cover the procedure.

He's such a proponent of the procedure that he recently became an instructor for the California-based Institute for Advanced Laser Dentistry.

Said Goel: "I was so moved by what this can do that I have to teach other people about it, because it's going to change the world."

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