

IS YOUR DENTIST REALLY RIPPING YOU OFF??

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No one says that going to the dentist is fun. Having someone intensely examine inside one's mouth, picking at the teeth is very uncomfortable. But that does not mean one should avoid the dentist at all costs either.

The mouth is one of the most important parts of the body. It's here that one eats, breathes and talks to other people, so it's important to keep it healthy. But what about the expense?

After all, dental work is considered to be super expensive, and those who have visited a dentist, or considered it, know that even the most basic dental procedures can be quite costly, with people often landing up in the hands of quacks to avoid the expenditure, leading up to numerous complications.

While it is very easy to see how expensive it is, it's wrong to assume that the dentist keeps all of the money one pays. Dentistry has very high overhead costs. Dentists have to pay for equipment costs, dental materials, personnel, educational loans, and for new technology, and these costs quickly add up. These are just a few of the expenses any dental office has.

There are a number of reasons

why dental procedures are so expensive. First, services are performed by trained professionals. Dentists go through many years of studying and training (priced in lakhs of rupees).

Like many other professionals, dental services are priced accordingly. Dentistry is not a commodity. It is a professional service that's both art and a science. Yes, there are excellent dentists and not-so-great dentists or quacks, not at all caring for the patient's health, providing services at dirt-cheap rates. Often, one gets what one pays for.

Dental services are not mass produced. While a patient may have been in the dental clinic for 60 minutes for a crown preparation, the dental team spends additional time working on the impressions, making models, disinfecting the impressions, preparing them for transport to the lab and communicating with the lab.

Sometimes dentists might also spend an additional hour or two, working on a case long after the patient leaves the office. This attention to detail takes time and costs money.

Dentists have far more

equipment than most medical physicians have. The tools on hand, at a general dentistry practice, include highly specialized equipment that is not only pricey to purchase, but also to maintain.

X-ray machines and dental chairs with the necessary light, trays and hookups, are really expensive. These alone cost as much as some cars do. This, of course, doesn't take into account the costs of the instruments, as well as the materials and other medications used in procedures.

A good, competent dentist would always invest in the best equipment. Dental equipment costs have skyrocketed with the increase in technologies used in dentistry today.

It is not uncommon for an average size office equipped with latest technology to have lakhs of rupees invested in the equipment alone. What the patient pays helps pay for the equipment dentists use to make their visit quick and comfortable.

Every piece of equipment in a dental clinic is maintained to strict standards so as to minimize the risk of any infection. The water that comes out of the dental units is first treated to prevent any bacteria or viruses from forming a film in the water lines.

Instruments are cleaned in ultrasonic cleaners, packaged and autoclaved between each use. Suction machines are disinfected and treated to prevent the spread of infection.

The autoclaves are monitored by an outside agency to verify and document their effectiveness. X-ray machines are calibrated and tested by the appropriate regulatory agencies annually.

Dental chairs are disinfected daily. All of this attention to patient health and safety takes employee time and costs money.

The education costs in becoming a dentist (much like the costs of becoming a lawyer) are astronomical. A big difference in the lawyer, though, is the above-mentioned equipment that the dental facilities have.

Dentists often turn to third-party labs for things like crowns and dentures, which are really expensive- the material cost of a crown is probably more than half the total fee of the dentist. Various dental labs differ in the quality of the products they produce. People want their dentists to be using high-quality labs for things like crowns and dentures, which, in turn, cost more.

Dentists also always want to use a good lab, because if the crown breaks, they are the one stuck redoing the thing for another hour for free. It doesn't make them look good, the patients get angry, and it's a waste of time. All this can also drive up the costs of certain procedures.

Almost all dentists have an assistant on staff. And, unlike many other medical professions, there are almost always TWO people working on patients at all times- the dentist, and his or her assistant.

In all of the above, there is no mention of the normal expenses that any office has, like rent, electricity, advertising, etc. There's also continued education (again, very expensive).

Anywhere from 60% to 80% of what a patient pays goes toward the expense of running a modern dental practice. Dentists

pay for rent on their clinic space, payroll for assistants and receptionists, taxes, and material supplies- just to name a few. People would be surprised to know how tight the profit margins are.

Add the entire cost up, and there is an overhead number that is simply amazing in how large it is. Most people won't believe this, but nobody becomes a dentist to get rich, especially a general dentist. When dentists charge for a root canal / crown combo that they spend an hour and a half on, they are making less than many accountants or lawyers.

Teeth are a crucial part of health and appearance. Untreated gum disease, for instance, is linked to heart disease (would one choose a cardiologist based on price?).

The realization is important that shopping price is a minor concern when it comes to health. Any minor cost differences calculated over a lifetime becomes insignificant.

Dentists love their profession, and it does afford them a solid middle-class lifestyle, and allows them to put something away for later as well. But dentists are hardly getting rich here.

They have also done their share of free work (meaning they don't get paid), and they'll always try and make themselves affordable to anyone who wants to visit them.

Every dentist works hard to balance the expense in providing quality care with the need to keep fees under control. So the next time a thought comes in one's mind that the dentists are charging too much, maybe they are just doing it just right.

