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Local orthodontist uses system that cuts down time in braces

By Lory Pounder

FRISCO - On average in this country, those with braces spend 26 months wearing them, said local orthodontist Dr. Al Bishop, DDS, MSD.

With a new device called "OrthoCAD IQ," the average is 13 months, he continued, adding that for some of his patients it has even meant six to nine months.

"It's a huge breakthrough in the orthodontic world," he said, making the comparison of going from wooden skis to the parabolic metal skis of today.

About five years ago, Bishop, who has an office in Frisco and Edwards, started testing OrthoCAD, and he is one of the first orthodontists in the state to use it. At the beginning, he used it on select patients. Now, that he has seen the results and mastered the system, it is what he uses for everyone.

And while it costs more up front, it saves money on the other end because the amount of visits are cut in half, Bishop said.

How it works is, first Bishop takes an impression of the patient's teeth and sends that to a lab in New Jersey along with a prescription for where he believes the braces should go. At the lab, they turn the impression into a digitized 3D picture of the patient's mouth and put the braces in the spots Bishop recommended.

From there, the image is sent back so he can see how braces would change the patient's teeth. Also, he can readjust the original prescription and see what the results would be.

"Every tooth is like our fingerprint," Bishop said, explaining why where the bracket is placed determines how the tooth moves.

Additionally, patients get to check out the results before coming in for the work. Bishop e-mails them a copy of the virtual model.

"It allows us to treat the patient on a computer before we treat them in the chair," he said while demonstrating on a computer image how he can make adjustments. As he made

slight changes on placement, the computer image moved the teeth with it.

Then, once he has the set up right, the impression is used to design a tray with the brackets in place to go exactly where they are on the computer. This eliminates the guess work that comes from putting them on manually and having to make later changes, Bishop said.

It also cuts down the time it takes to put them on, he added. In fact, this way it takes 30 minutes to put on a full set of braces, compared to a two to three hours.

Still, this system is not widely used, he said, adding that that is likely because of the costs and some doctors being slow to change. The preparation work requires learning a new skill and means having to adjust it to work appropriately because the bond strength is less than if the brackets were put on manually, he said.

There's a learning curve, just like there is switching from skiing to snowboarding, Bishop said. But by learning it, he has seen wonderful results that benefit the patients, he said.

"It's like virtual orthodontics," Bishop said.