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REALTIME - Friday 30 September 2005

A spa for smiles

"I'm counting the days to my next visit. I never thought I say that about going to a dentist," Kevin Fleming wrote to Dr Lily. Kevin is an American based in Baghdad. The everyday bombing in Iraq's capital doesn't make his hair stand on end, but stepping into a dentist's does _ or did. Dr Lily, or Dr Watchareewon Porncharoen, and her Bangkok Dental Spa Clinic gave Kevin his Hollywood smile plus a positive attitude towards dentistry.



As Asia's first dental spa, the clinic welcomed its first client _ a PhD in e-commerce from Middlesex University _ in 2001, shortly after Dr Lily introduced her dental services on the Internet.

"It was incredible. Flying to Thailand for dental service? You know, some foreigners think that we're still a Third World country, riding elephants in the jungle when we've gone farther than that _ now we're playing polo on elephantback," she says. "I believed that there was a market for this type of service but I didn't think it would be so well-received."

Thereafter, from the US, Australia and even places like Caledonia, patients came knocking on the clinic's door. "In their countries, dental costs may be very expensive and the service may not encourage people to go and see a dentist," Dr Lily states. But why do they come all the way to her dental spa? "We combine our skills, high technology of dentistry, and charming spa ambience with Thai hospitality in providing dental care. That's what attracts them and makes them come back. And no one in the world can copy Thai hospitality," explains the pioneer of dental spas and dental tours.

The clinic doesn't look or feel like a dentist's office. There are three reception areas where one can calm down amid the smell of lavender and the sounds of trickling water and light music. The ambience is contemporary Thai with a number of golden hands used as decorative accents to represent the healing touch of the dentist and the massage therapist.

Yes, besides the nine dentists, one massage therapist is available to provide massages as complementary medicine to the dental treatments. And in addition to three dental treatment rooms, there are two neat spa treatment rooms equipped with a shower for any patients who need to lie down for a body massage.

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Mid-Year 2004
Year-End 2003
Mid-Year 2003
Year-End 2002
Mid-Year 2002
Year-End 2001
Mid-Year 2001
Year-End 2000
Mid-Year 2000
Year-End 1999
SERVICES
Printing
SOCIAL PROJECTS
Leper Foundation
Post Foundation
We Care
EDUCATION
Learning Post
Student Weekly
Word-a-Day
ADVERTISING
Int'l Print Ads
Web Ads
SUBSCRIBE
Bangkok Post
Post Today
Student Weekly
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Annual Report 2004
Annual Report 2003
Annual Report 2002
Annual Report 2001
Annual Report 2000
Annual Report 1999
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Dr Lily explains that not every patient asks for this service, but if she sees anyone who needs a dose of relaxation _ perhaps due to jet lag _ she'll send them to the massage therapist before starting any work.

The clinic specialises in cosmetic dentistry and caters mainly to foreign visitors who come for a dental overhaul that may take several sessions. A soothing massage can therefore help de-stress the patient during their treatments, and sometimes the dentists themselves enjoy a break with a back massage. "We also get stressed or suffer from backaches and a massage can help us do our job better, " Dr Lily says.

She doesn't want her 400-square metre clinic to resemble a factory, with patients passing through on a conveyor belt, so Dr Lily's philosophy is to balance quality, professional treatments with quality time spent getting to know the patients. Surprisingly, her patients keep in touch with her and her staff by sending "Thank you" postcards like Kevin's.

Applying the spa philosophy to dental work helped cure many patients with "dentalphobia". Her clinic has put Thailand on the map and reinforces the country's image as a medical hub. "For a holiday, they may choose to go elsewhere but for a holiday and a happy dental overhaul they prefer to come here," she says.

Bangkok Dental Spa Clinic is located on the 2nd floor of Methawattana Building, Sukhumvit 19. For more information, call 02-651-0807 or visit www.bangkokdentalspa.com.

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