

# Doctor of Smiles

It takes rare enthusiasm for a dentist to convince you that his profession is exciting, but listen to Hirokazu Enatsu, D.D.S. explaining the latest root-canal techniques and you'll be hooked.

"Dentistry is an art and a science," he says as his eyes light up. "Teeth are a part of the body, a part of you, and have to be treated accordingly."

At Enatsu's United Dental Office (UDO), 75% of the patients are English-speaking foreigners. The phone is answered in English and their Web site is in English.

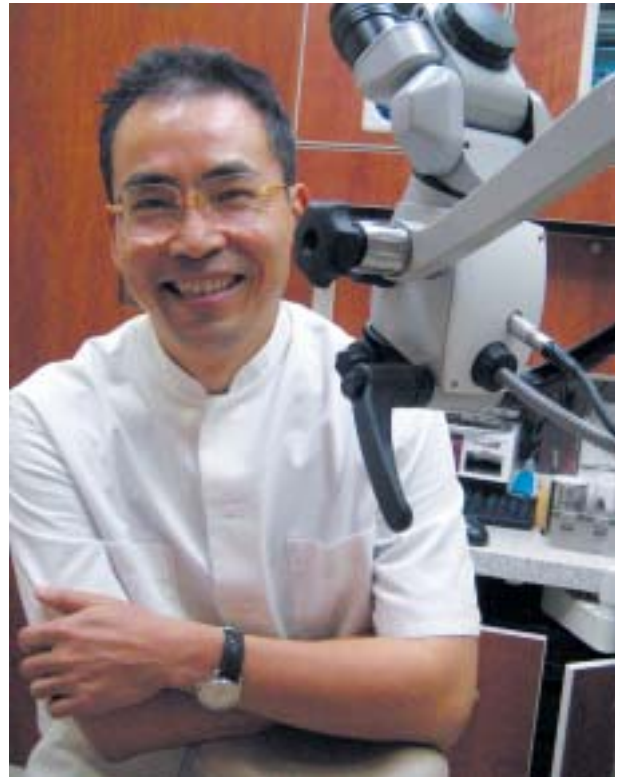
"We start [a phone conversation] in English and switch to Japanese later if necessary," Enatsu says. "We try not to scare away the Japanese, but I set this practice up to create a safe and recognizable place for the foreign community." The approach has worked. Even though marketing is limited to the Web site and personal recommendations, the clinic in Kamiyacho is always full.

"We have a very high standard of care that matches what people from overseas are used to," Enatsu says. Trained in the U.S. and with 22 years experience, he uses the U.S. approach of focusing on prevention and daily care. Where Japan went wrong, he says, was in not educating the general public about the importance of preventive care. Another beef concerns the insurance system, which he says is set up to discourage preventive treatment.

"It is tricky," he says, "but the way the system works now means that treatment of a disease is covered, but anything designed to prevent the disease [from] occurring in the first place is not."

Enatsu tired of having to explain repeatedly that insurance covered only a few of the most basic treatments. Rather than deal with all the fuss and limitations that insurance imposes on topnotch dental treatment, he decided it was easier to opt out of the system entirely.

"We don't accept insurance," he says. "I save time because foreigners ask a lot of questions and really want to know about all of the available options. I prefer to go for the best-quality treatment every



GABRIELLE KENNEDY

Dr. Hirokazu Enatsu has mastered the art, the science and the market focus of dentistry.

time." This stance also gives him the freedom to make use of the latest technology. He also utilizes up-to-the-minute cosmetic-care procedures, such as invisible "go wireless" alignment.

"My patients aren't from the local community," he says. "They are busy, they travel a lot, and presentation in their line of work usually matters." Enatsu says it is mostly men who come in requesting cosmetic help. This is consistent with research by the Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry in the U.S., showing that 74% of the people think a good smile can mean more career success.

Enatsu believes strongly in ongoing education for himself. To stay ahead of the game, he has traveled to the U.S. three times already this year for seminars and courses. Domestically trained dentists are far less likely to make any comparable effort.

"Theoretically, a Japanese dentist could have received a practicing license 40 years ago and not attended a single course since," he says.

Despite dentistry's generally gruesome reputation Enatsu manages to make it appealing. In fact, his zeal for teeth makes a visit to the dentist almost worth it.

Tokyo-based Gabrielle Kennedy writes for various publications on culture, society and women's issues.