

Patients demand instant aesthetic results

An interview with Dr Sim Tang Eng, AAAD president



Dr Sim Tang Eng

_cosmetic dentistry: *Dr Sim, would you please tell us a bit about yourself, your background and your initial involvement in dentistry?*

Dr Sim Tang Eng: I graduated from the University of Malaya in 1985 and obtained my MFGDP(UK) in 1997. I undertook clinical attachment in Oral Implantology at Goethe University Frankfurt and was awarded the Certificate in Oral Implantology in 2001. I served as part-time clinical supervisor and lecturer in the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Malaya and was a lecturer of the Oral Implantology course organised jointly by the University of Malaya and Goethe University Frankfurt. I am now in a private group practice and my work is focused on aesthetic dentistry and implantology.

_How was the Asian Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry (AAAD) established and who qualifies to be a member?

The AAAD was established as an umbrella body for the various aesthetic dentistry academies/associations/societies in the many Asian countries. Following a preliminary meeting in Korea of interested representatives from Korea, Japan and Singapore in 1989, a formal meeting was convened at the Prince Philip Dental Hospital in Hong Kong for the founding of the AAAD on 15 January 1990. At this historic meeting, which was chaired by Prof Stephen Wei, the founding officers were unanimously elected, with Prof Michio Haga from Japan as Founding President of the AAAD. Since then, the Academy has grown annually and the number of member countries has increased from the original three to include China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand.

In order to become a member of AAAD, one must hold a university dental degree. One can become a member through the institutional membership of an aesthetic dentistry organisation in one of the member countries, or privately. The AAAD aims to have all member countries register as institutional members in order to simplify the logistics of keeping track of membership records.

_The 11th biennial AAAD meeting is going to be held in May. What objectives would you like to fulfil through this year's meeting?

In accordance with the objectives of AAAD, the main objective will be the promotion of the art and science of the disciplines in aesthetic dentistry. This is the first time that the biennial AAAD meeting will be held in Malaysia and it certainly is an opportunity for many of our dental colleagues to experience the meeting and visit beautiful Malaysia. I hope the meeting will foster greater understanding amongst Malaysian and other Asian dentists, besides providing an opportunity to experience the excellent scientific meetings that AAAD organises biennially in this region.

This year's biennial meeting boasts some of the best speakers and clinicians in aesthetic dentistry in the world. It is very difficult to book them and we thus had to plan their lecture schedules way in advance. This meeting will be a golden learning opportunity for our colleagues in Asia, particularly in Malaysia. Thanks to this meeting, our colleagues will not have to fly halfway around the globe and pay hefty registration fees in order to hear these top speakers at meetings in USA and Europe. I am sure it will be an eye-opening and rewarding experience to see and hear the level of aesthetic dentistry presented by the four keynote speakers, Dr Galip Gurel, Dr Mauro Fradeani, Dr Didier Dietschi and Dr Rhys Spoor. In the process, I hope attendees will be inspired and never look at aesthetic dentistry the same way again.

_In your opinion, how important is continuing education in the field of cosmetic dentistry?

Very important! In fact, I strongly believe that all dental professionals who profess to practise aesthetic or cosmetic dentistry must keep up-to-date with the developments in dental materials, technology and clinical techniques, as this clinical discipline changes dynamically and rapidly. They have to possess knowledge of sound scientific theories and clinical practice. They owe it to their patients who entrust them with the responsibility of providing quality aesthetic dentistry. This is only possible if the dentists keep abreast of developments through continuing education.

_What options for continuing education are available for Asian dentists?

There are basically two options available. Firstly, besides the biennial AAAD meetings, dentists can attend the numerous scientific meetings and hands-on workshops organised regularly by the various national aesthetic dentistry organisations in the Asian region. Those who are really eager can attend the meetings organised by the International Federation of Esthetic Dentistry, American Academy of Esthetic Dentistry, European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry and American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. These are excellent meetings but dentists will have to travel great distances to the meeting venues. Secondly, dentists can attend the structured programmes organised by universities. Several US universities offer courses, on part-time or full-time basis, tailored for aesthetic dentistry. In addition, it is extremely important for dentists to read journals and textbooks regularly in order to enrich their knowledge. I find that most dentists want to take the easy route by depending only on lectures and fellow colleagues for information.

Standards and education vary greatly throughout the region. Do you see your organisation as a representative for the profession?

I certainly think this is the way forward. The AAAD can act as an accreditation body by conducting courses and examinations regionally for aspiring dentists who wish to be proficient in aesthetic dentistry. Those qualified can then be awarded a fellowship so that patients can recognise them as having achieved a certain acceptable standard.

What are the objectives of the AAAD and what role does the Academy play in Asia?

This is best summarised by the objectives of the AAAD as stated in the constitution. The Academy is a non-profit and non-political organisation and shall not discriminate against creed or race. The Academy shall promote the art and science of disciplines in aesthetic dentistry, and popularise and advance the science and practice of aesthetic dentistry by organising regular scientific meetings. Furthermore, the Academy shall encourage research in Aesthetic Dentistry and inform the public of aesthetic dentistry and its practices through periodic news releases.

Driven by patient demand, the field of aesthetic dentistry has gained much prominence in recent years. What are the current trends in aesthetic dentistry in Asia?

With greater exposure to the media and the Internet, as well as increasing affluence, Asians have followed trends in the West when it comes to demands in aesthetic dentistry. Increasingly more patients now chose veneers or have their teeth bleached in order to obtain their ideal set of sparkling white teeth. The preference for full-ceramic crowns instead of the traditional porcelain-fused-to-metal crowns is definitely

on the rise for obvious aesthetic reasons. The trend for quick fix with veneers or crowns in mildly crowded dentition instead of conventional orthodontic treatment is also gaining in popularity, especially amongst working adults. Patients demand instant aesthetic results with the least amount of interference in their lives.

Even in orthodontics, I understand that patients request invisible braces. More patients are also aware of the appearance of their gingiva instead of just their teeth and this has invariably resulted in increasing demand for periodontal plastic surgery as well. The list goes on and on.

Asians tend to be guided by Western stereotypes in terms of aesthetics. Have you witnessed this pattern in dentistry?

Rightly or wrongly, I think it is generally true. Just ask any dentist who has been practising aesthetic dentistry long enough. It is not uncommon to have patients coming into the office with close-up photographs of Western models or film stars with the request to have their teeth done the same way.

What is perceived as an attractive smile in Asia?

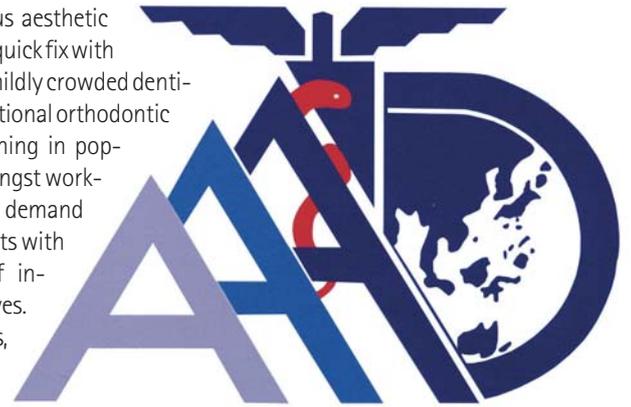
I think the general rules governing an aesthetic smile apply universally. Tooth proportion of the anterior teeth is generally the exception. Asians tend to have narrower anterior teeth, i.e. lower width-to-length ratio compared to Caucasians.

As witnessed at all major dental exhibitions last year, digitalisation is the new trend in dentistry. What has the effect of this increasing digitalisation been?

It certainly is a boon to the practice of aesthetic dentistry. It makes communication and presentation so much easier. The archiving of clinical photographs, which is of utmost importance, is now an easy task thanks to digitalisation.

What are your plans for the future?

My term as the AAAD President ends with my handing over of office to Prof Hisashi Hisamitsu at the biennial meeting this coming May. I will continue to contribute in whatever way I can to the progress of the AAAD, particularly in the areas of sharing my clinical knowledge with the various national aesthetic dentistry organisations. I will remain active in my clinical practice, as I believe one can only teach and share meaningfully if one has the experience and regular practice.



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