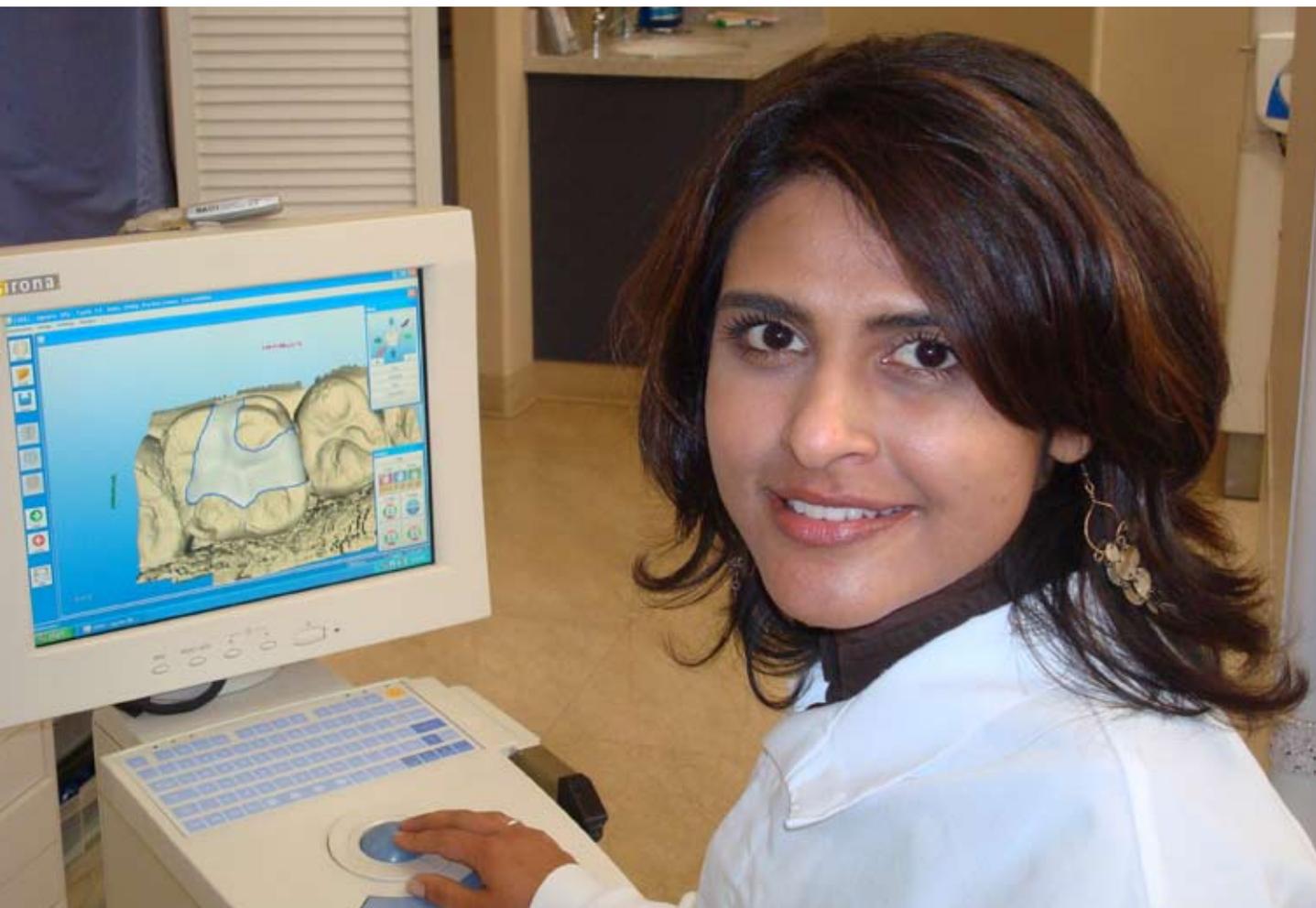


# GREEN DENTISTRY



## WEST COAST DENTIST OPENS SAN FRANCISCO'S FIRST GREEN DENTAL PRACTICE

by Daniel Casciato

*Above: Dr. Patel and the Cerec Machine. The machine also makes biocompatible fillings and allows for the conservation of the natural tooth.*

DR. NAMRATA PATEL DID NOT WANT TO just start a dental practice. She long had a desire to make a difference in the workplace environment for herself, her employees, and especially for her clients.

So she took an innovative approach to dentistry by incorporating green practices and opened up the first green dental practice in San Francisco, CA last summer. She is also currently building a LEED certified office, which will be ready January.

"I wanted to be green in the way we work and also the way our office is set up," says Patel, owner of the eco-friendly Green Dentistry. "I think we all need to do our share to invest in a greener future for everyone."

Green Dentistry is not only the name of her practice, but is also the name of the revolutionary approach at combining high-quality conservative dentistry while protecting the patient and the environment.

Patel says that her practice is committed

“SO RARELY DO WE THINK ABOUT [GREEN PRACTICES] AT OUR WORKPLACE WHERE WE SPEND THE MOST TIME DURING THE DAY.”

to using nontoxic products, reducing waste, and being minimally invasive.

“I’m a dentist by nature and I also come from a very organic background,” she says. “Green dentistry is wonderful because it’s where I can make a difference. We often think of using green products in our home and keeping our home clean, but so rarely do we think about doing it at our workplace where we spend the most time during the day. It’s not about a healthy home; it’s about a healthy work environment as well.”

“It’s really exciting to do this because of all the innovations in dentistry,” she says. “More and more materials are coming out every day, which is nice.”

Although she admits that the uniqueness of combining green practices with her dental practice has been good in attracting clients, she says there are other factors that have helped her gain a following.

“I think there are two things that are very important to my practice,” she says. “In addition to being green, customer service is also important.”

Because optimizing her client’s oral health is very important to her, Patel utilizes many educational tools to help clients understand their need for treatment. Each appointment begins with a thorough exam of a client’s teeth, gums, bone, jaw joints, and soft tissue. She works with each patient to design a long-term dental care plan based on personal needs.

“We work in partnership with our clients,” she explains. “We spend time



#### GREEN PRACTICES USED BY DR. PATEL’S OFFICE

- Using steam-based instrument sterilization, which contains no harmful chemicals.
- Preventing pollution of their water system through a special filtration system to allow environmentally sound disposal of old mercury fillings.
- Using digital imaging (not traditional X-rays), which means 75 to 90 percent less radiation exposure to patients and reduction in the use of toxic X-ray development chemicals.
- Equipping her office with all energy conserving appliances.
- Installing only energy efficient T8 and MR16 lighting and using natural cooling via ventilation instead of energy consuming air conditioners.
- Printing business cards and pamphlets with soy ink.

*Above: Dr. Patel’s Cerec Machine (far left) enables large scale tooth restoration in one visit by eliminating the need for sending restorations to a lab, temporary crowns and taking impressions of your teeth. A mercury filling replacement is shown.*



Above: (from left to right) Erica Su'a, Client Coordinator; Dr. Patel; and Melanie Melenes, Treatment Coordinator

with the clients and co-discover, co-diagnose, and work with them so we can get them where they need to be. We do that together, which is usually the key."

As Patel works towards the opening of her LEED certified business in January, she is currently seeing about 20 clients per month by working only 3 days a week.

"Being LEED certified is huge because it's going to be the first of its kind," she says.

Patel is a leader in the industry. She is conducting research and development to set standards in Green Dentistry. She brought the Teleosis chapter to San Francisco. Teleosis is a nonprofit organization that helps doctors practice ecologically sustainable medicine. She also serves as an Enviro-mentor for the San Francisco Environment Agency to help small businesses become green.

Patel hopes to see more businesses invest in green practices.

"It's the wave of the future, and you're investing in yourself by using green practices," she says. "It's the smartest thing you can do, so why would you not invest in green practices? This is your future. If you don't do it, then who will?" GBQ

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*The program demonstrates the environmental impact of health care and potential risks to human and ecological health. Participants will also gain the tools, skills, and resources to conduct a comprehensive worksite assessment to "green" their medical practice. Participant benefits include reduced resource consumption, financial savings, improved employee morale and wellness, increased client satisfaction, and recognition in the industry as an environmental leader.*

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