

Doing good and doing well

By providing free treatment for the elderly and the needy, B9 Dental Centre has lifted overall dentistry standards – and changed more than a few lives in the process

B9 DENTAL Centre may only be two years old, but its contributions to Singapore are already unmistakable. By providing high-quality dental care at fair and transparent prices, the clinic has helped to lift overall dentistry standards – and has changed more than a few lives in the process. If that sounds like a sweeping statement, consider this: at B9, the elderly and those from low-income families get free treatment for basic services, such as cleanings and extractions. Said B9 chief executive officer Raymond Lim: "Many of these patients can't afford dental treatment, and they have a lot of broken teeth. That's dangerous especially for the elderly, because broken teeth and gum disease can lead to heart problems. Here, we don't reject you just because you cannot pay."

While the government gives dental care subsidies to the elderly and those from low-income families, these subsidies are sometimes insufficient to cover a basic cleaning. "But we still treat these patients for free – they don't pay a single cent. And all the aunts and uncles are always so happy because they have never had the chance to get their dental problems fixed before," says Dr Lim.

A patients-first approach

It's apt, then, that B9 is so named because it sounds like "be nice". While Dr Lim had previously worked in brand-name chains with clinics around the island, he knew that someday, he would aim to run his own clinic. That dream turned into reality in March 2013, when he opened his Clementi branch.

"When I started B9, my motivation was to build a practice that is nice to everyone, and where everything is done in a good way," says Dr Lim. Part of the good comes from being a business with great heart, by treating patients who would otherwise find dental care prohibitively expensive. B9 also absorbs all GST (goods & services tax) charges – a hefty six-figure sum yearly.

But another part comes from upholding high service standards, with an unwavering commitment to putting patients' interests first. To achieve this, Dr Lim creates an ecosystem where technology, bedside manners, and even clinic design melds together for an optimal patient experience.

Take for instance B9's approach to providing an infection-free environment. While a sterilisation machine is a standard feature in any dental clinic, B9 invests in pricey autoclave cleaners. Because these use a pressure chamber that subjects supplies to high-pressure saturated steam, such machines not only clean the surface of tools, but also sterilise at the micro level as well.

B9 clinics are also custom-fitted with handle-free drawers, to minimise the need for dentists to touch unclean surfaces with their fingers. Instead of using his hands to pull open a cabinet, Dr Lim uses only his elbow, knee, or foot to press on drawers; these then spring outwards for easy access to their contents.

Says Dr Lim: "It's worth it to invest, whether in equipment or in smart clinic designs, so that infection control is a priority. Just imagine that it's someone you love sitting in your chair – you'd want to make sure that there's no chance of them contracting an infection."

B9 also uses technology to improve the quality of communication between dentists and patients. For example, clinics are outfitted with intraoral cameras – portable hand-held cameras that take extremely detailed images of the mouth, teeth, and gums for diagnosis. Pictures taken are used to explain a patients' condition.

"We register a photo before and after treatment for all patients, at no charge. We do this because we want to let the patient understand what condition they have and what we'll do to address it. Actually what I'm trying to do is to improve communication, because without this camera, the dentist will just tell the patient: 'You have this and that,' and whether or not the patient understands him will depend on his imagination. With pictures, the patients can clearly see what I'm saying," says Dr Lim.



PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR

This effort to ensure fairness and transparency also extends to its pricing. For one, B9's rates are reasonable. But beyond affordability, B9 is also unique in its refusal to charge add-on fees – it does not bill customers for sterilisation, consumables or consultation fees.

One of his more controversial approaches to high-quality patient care is his insistence that every single treatment room be outfitted with a CCTV camera. "This is good for the patient, and it's also good for the doctor. We are also telling patients that we have nothing to hide," notes Dr Lim.

Thriving business

These upstanding business practices have served B9 well; the group has undergone a rapid expansion in the past couple of years, and is showing no signs of stopping.

In fact, what started as a single clinic in Clementi in 2013 has now grown to a group of three clinics, with the other two located at Toa Payoh and Star Vista. The original Clementi clinic will also double its footprint come August this year. Plans to expand domestically and to Malaysia and Indonesia in the next five years are also on the cards, reveals Dr Lim.

But how does a big-hearted company survive and make profits, especially when it absorbs GST, offers far cheaper

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prices, and even gives free treatment to some? "When a patient understands what you're doing and sees that you are doing good, they will eventually feel the difference and slowly introduce more and more people to you," says Dr Lim.

In fact, as a mark of the group's performance – revenue growth increased 30 per cent year-on-year from 2013 to 2014 – Dr Lim has been approached by several investors who are keen to get in on B9's winning formula. Even with his humble demeanour, his pride for the business is understandably palpable. After all, B9 has proven that businesses can do good, and still do well.

B9 Dental[®]
Centre
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We have a passion for excellence in dental services. Each of our patients receives the very best advice and personal guidance for their situation.

We provide professional treatments with skill, precision and absolute dedication – based on fair, reasonable and transparent pricing. At all times, we ensure a caring and compassionate environment that promotes comfort and peace of mind.

THE COMPLETE WELLBEING OF OUR PATIENTS IS OUR MISSION: NOTHING LESS WILL DO.



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