

Jaw-dropping risks behind perfect smile

Beezy Marsh

THE quest for a celebrity smile is damaging healthy teeth and costing patients thousands of pounds for “quick-fix” cosmetic dentistry that does not last, experts have warned.

Dentists are cashing in on the demand for gleaming smiles, popularised by reality TV shows such as *The Only Way is Essex*, even though the procedures can do irreversible harm to healthy teeth, according to the dental surgery faculty at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. One

expert called the trend “porcelain pornography” and “destructodontics”.

The college says vulnerable patients are being poorly informed about long-term damage and complications resulting from some of the most popular procedures.

Risky treatments include “smile makeovers” using porcelain or ceramic veneers on healthy teeth, and short-term orthodontics, which can cost from £5,000 to £20,000.

Patients are largely unaware that in the case of “smile makeovers” as much as a third of each tooth will be permanently filed down, the college says.

Many are not told that up to half of porcelain veneers will not last 10 years, meaning

further treatments will be required.

Martin Kelleher, consultant in restorative dentistry at King’s College Dental Institute and a fellow of the royal college’s dental faculty, said the trend amounted to “destructodontics” of healthy teeth.

“The fashion for what I term ‘porcelain pornography’ is a real and present danger for society and the dental profession at large,” he said. “This type of dentistry appears to be promoted by individuals and in certain dental publications that have strong commercial interests in their proliferation.

“Lured by promises of rapid profits, some younger dental colleagues are being encouraged down a path leading to the unnecessary destruction of sound teeth.”

Between 2006 and 2012, the cost of compensation claims relating to aesthetic dentistry increased fourfold. The number of complaints relating to short-term braces alone has risen by a fifth since 2010. Most claims are directed at general dental practitioners (sometimes marketed as “cosmetic dentists”) rather than specialist orthodontists or restorative dental surgeons.

In many cases, complaints relate to incomplete, misleading or biased information

being given to patients, while some relate to exaggerated claims of expertise in “cosmetic” dentistry.

Short-term orthodontics, such as teeth-straightening with braces, have a heightened risk of relapse and can require lifelong profes-

sional supervision if the patient does not use a permanent retainer to hold teeth in their new position. Without these measures the teeth tip back to their original position.

Even if another course of short-term orthodontics is undertaken to resolve the problem, the back-and-forth tipping pressures can make the teeth’s roots shallow and make them likelier to fall out later in life.

The value of the cosmetic dentistry industry is projected to reach £3.6bn this year, as Britons become increasingly image-conscious. Social networking and the need for an online presence for work make the perfect smile more desirable than ever.

Robert Chate, consultant orthodontist and vice-dean of the royal college’s dental faculty, believes that some dentists may be putting financial gain ahead of their patients’ wellbeing.

“The rise in complaints



clearly shows that the benefits of these quick-fix treatments are undoubtedly being over-sold, with little or no mention about their risks and limitations," he said.

Chate, who has previously published the college's concerns about short-term orthodontics in the British Dental Journal, added: "There is a failure on the part of some dentists to manage the expectations of their patients, placing an over-reliance on digital systems, in which the desired outcome is simulated on a computer screen before treatment, giving patients a rose-tinted view of what essentially will be a limited result.

"With up to a quarter of orthodontic retainers failing after six years of use, the relapse potential for crowded teeth that have been managed using short-term aligners is very real.

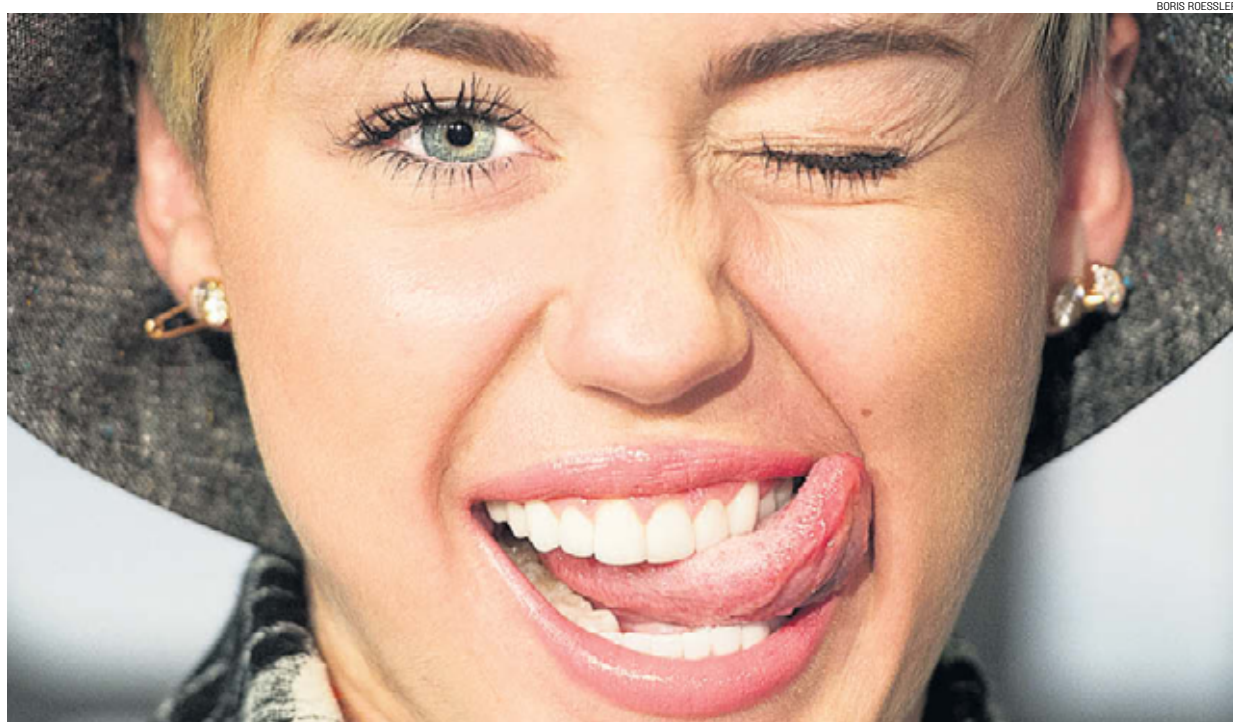
"Associated with this comes the risk of placing a patient's long-term dental health in jeopardy — all for the sake of the enticing lure of a quick fix."

The deans of the four UK dental faculties recently wrote to Lord Howe, the health minister with responsibility for quality, offering to contribute to any new reviews on developing standards and regulations for "cosmetic" dentistry.



Joey Essex:
 helped
 popularise
 demand





The apparently perfect teeth displayed by stars such as the singer Miley Cyrus are leading some fans to undergo risky treatments that can cause permanent damage

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