

H E A L T H C A R E

Au natural: Conventional dentistry meets pomegranate

By ALISON SNYDER

Many of today's trends lean toward the "natural," and even the health-care industry is not immune.

Natural childbirth – as in drug-free delivery – remains a popular option. Nutritional supplements fill entire aisles at the supermarket. Even dentists are going natural, as mercury fillings and other dental chemicals go the way of the dodo.

Meet Terry Shapiro, holistic dentist. The transition of her Setauket practice has been gradual, but she already considers it a success: Her patient base has doubled because of an approach that champions natural remedies and alternative therapies, Shapiro said, to about 1,000 annually.

Her business model is one part holistic and two parts nostalgic. Instead of focusing on quantity – a mistake, she said,

made by many large dental practices – Shapiro goes for quality, spending time addressing the specific needs of each patient.

"My bottom line is how my patients feel," she said.

At play is a "wellness" movement, Shapiro added, wherein prevention aims to avoid costly repair work. Catching things early (and avoiding unnatural treatments when possible) saves patients more than a few toothaches and dollars.

Shapiro's practice doesn't completely eschew conventional dentistry, but instead builds on it. Sure, like any dentist, Shapiro drills when she must – but she also swears by toothpastes comprised of pomegranate and tea-tree oil. Taking what she considers an evidenced-based approach, she is also known to refer dental patients to acupuncturists, hypnotists and even massage therapists.

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