Zooming in on whitening

Steven Scannell discusses tooth whitening from a dental hygienist's perspective and explains why he chooses to use Philips Zoom

Previous to becoming a hygienist, Steven worked as a qualified dental nurse for 10 years. He qualified as a dental hygienist from the University of Essex.

Tooth whitening is an easy, non-invasive way of improving your smile.

As teeth absorb whitening differently, the length of treatment may vary. This means some patients may need to carry out whitening for longer than others.

It is difficult to predict exactly what shade of white the teeth will lighten to, however following the treatment we generally see a more even and lighter shade all round.

Dental hygienists carrying out tooth whitening need to have completed an appropriate training course, this then allows them to carry out the treatment.

These courses are available either online or hands on.

A prescription needs to be obtained from a dentist after they have seen the patient and confirmed that their teeth are healthy and it is suitable for them to go ahead with the whitening treatment.

It is worth bearing in mind that restorations like crowns and fillings won't change colour. It is important that this is explained to the patients before they start the process to ensure they have realistic expectations of what the treatment should achieve.

Some patients find they get some sensitivity during the home whitening part of the treatment. However, this doesn't tend to continue for too long after the whitening has been completed.

I always advise my patients to use a sensitive toothpaste before, during and after the whitening to help reduce this as much as possible.

I also give my patients an advice sheet on what to do should they get any sensitivity.

Case study
One particular patient was interested in tooth whitening because they wanted to improve the appearance of their smile before starting Invisalign braces.

Patients will often whiten their teeth at the end of the Invisalign process because it is a nice way to finish off the treatment. However, in this case the patient was keen to see some improvements straight away. So they decided to start with the whitening first.

I took before photos and used a shade guide to see what colour the teeth were before commencing the treatment.

I started with Philips Zoom in chair whitening, which involved applying 6% hydrogen peroxide gel to the teeth and activating under the white speed light for 15 minutes.

I then removed the whitening gel and repeated this process four times. An instant result could be seen after this stage.

The patient was then given their custom-made whitening trays and whitening gel to continue the process at home for one more week. This helps to lock in and boost the results further.

Results
I reviewed the patient two weeks later taking more photos and used the shade guide to check what colour the teeth were.

The start shade for this patient was C1, which is around the middle of our shade guide and is an average shade for a lot of patients.

Figure 1: Before

'Deciding which products to use for whitening often comes down to personal preference and what works best in your practice'

At the two-week review, having then completed the home whitening, the shade went to above B1. This is the lightest shade on our shade guide.

Figure 2: After

This surpassed our expectations and both myself and the patient were very happy with these amazing results.

I always tend to use Philips Zoom for my whitening patients as it is one of the leading brands in tooth whitening. Philips is also very supportive and is always trying to improve its products where it can.

I find I get great results for my patients when I use the combination of in chair and home whitening.

There are lots of other whitening products and treatments out there which also offer great results and are equally as good. However, in this particular case I chose to use Philips.

Deciding which products to use for whitening often comes down to personal preference and what works best in your practice